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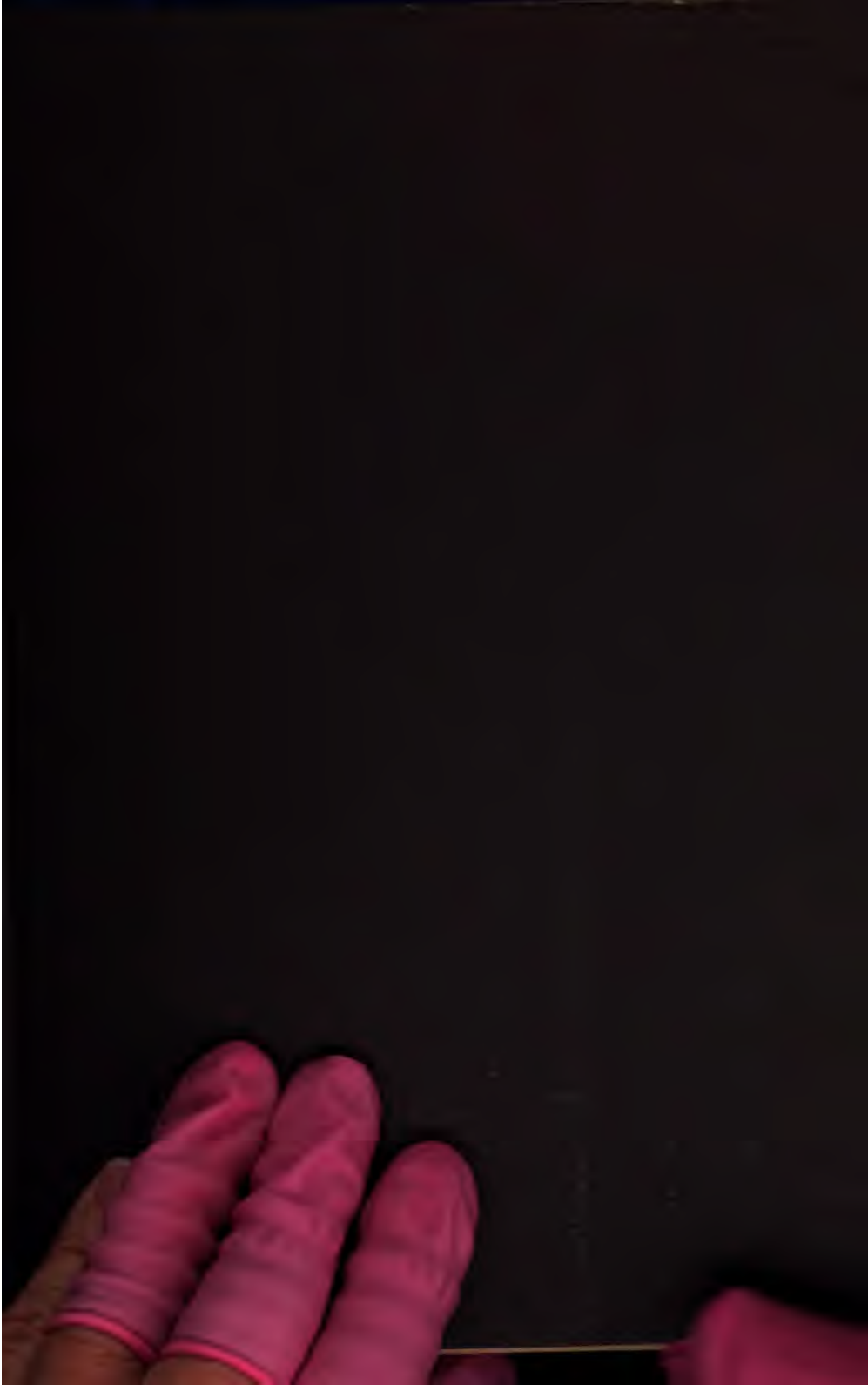


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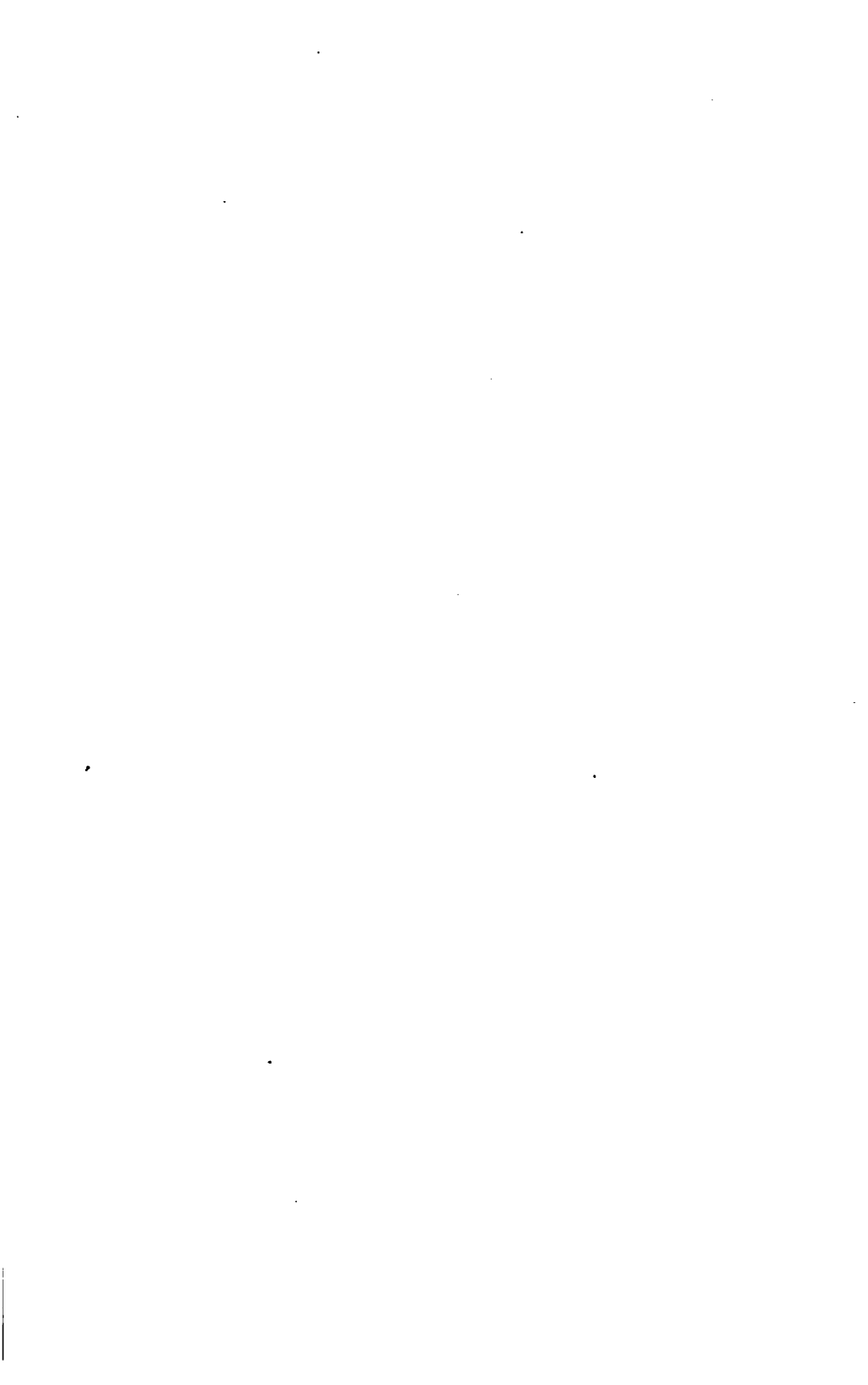


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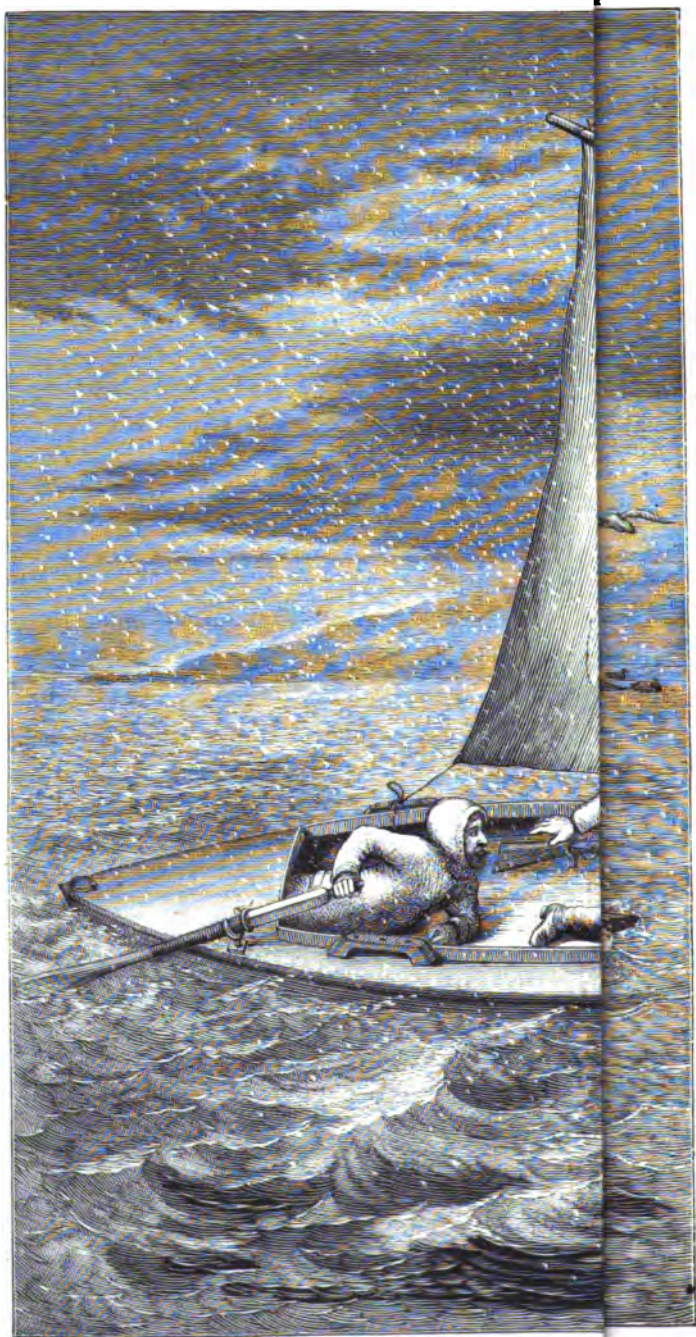












"WILDFOWLER" A

# MODERN WILDFOWLING.

BY

"WILDFOWLER"

OF "THE FIELD."



LONDON:  
HORACE COX,  
"THE FIELD" OFFICE, 346, STRAND. W.C.

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1880.

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## P R E F A C E.

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THIS volume constitutes the fourth sporting work from my pen, and is, *bonâ fide*, published at the absolutely spontaneous suggestion of many of the leading sportsmen of the day—who, when my articles on Modern Wildfowling were appearing in *The Field*, not only were most flatteringly unanimous in their praises, but actually asked that these articles should re-appear in book form. This wish of theirs is now fulfilled; and, in order to render the work as complete as possible, I have incorporated therein every information of note which was elicited whilst my papers were appearing, and I seize upon this opportunity for cordially thanking those practical sportsmen who did me the honour of agreeing with, or discussing my views, and who thus gave to all, in the most sportsmanlike manner, the benefit of their own individual experience.

Personally, in writing my share of this book, I have done my very best, simply because wildfowling, when the gun is brought into play, is, to my mind (after trying well-nigh every sport under the sun), *incomparably superior to them all*, and it accordingly possesses for me the most fascinating attraction. If my readers, after perusing this volume, should come to the same conclusion, I could hope for no better result.

“WILDFOWLER.”

95, HIGHBURY HILL, LONDON.





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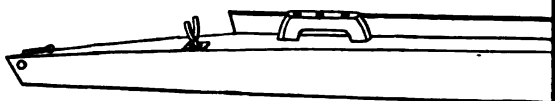
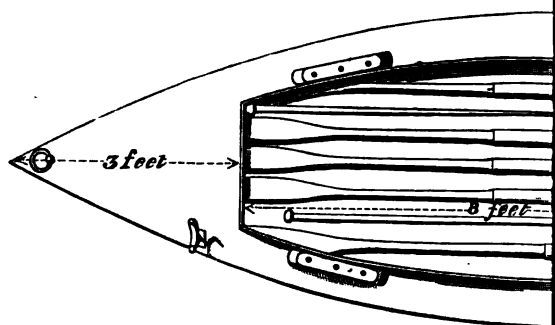
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(This punt was or

# MODERN WILDFOWLING.

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## PUNTING.

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### INTRODUCTION.

No branch of shooting has such very ardent votaries as the art of wildfowl shooting, and the reasons for the extraordinary hold which this pursuit invariably obtains on all sportsmen who try it are not very far to seek. Firstly, it is the only sport nowadays wherein success is absolutely uncertain and totally beyond any preconceived arrangement; secondly, you must go into decidedly wild spots, and submit to dangers of many kinds, if you wish to find the birds; and, thirdly, there are so many ways of carrying on the pursuit that one never wearies of them all. Thus, shooting, when it has wildfowl for its object, combines all the elements which tend to make of it a strictly enticing sport, since the uncertainty is so great as to keep hope always burning within one's breast, and since every branch of the calling has to be carried on in quite a distinct manner and in totally different spots, and is generally accompanied by a degree of peril which renders the pursuit perfectly fascinating. The all-round wildfowl shooter, to be a successful man, must therefore be of a buoyant nature, and not easily put out; he must be doggedly determined, at all costs, to carry out his plans; he must also be hardy in his constitution; he must be a good oarsman, an excellent sailor, a good shot, and a "knowing" sportsman, full of wrinkles and

expedients; and he must enjoy that average amount of pluck which is a *sine quâ non* in his pursuit.

To the well-to-do educated man, the sport is of the most charming description. The strange spots where he finds himself; the lonely nature of his surroundings; the quaint cries he hears when the fowl and shore birds are about; the briny smell of the sea; the every-varying tide; the now rough and now smooth wind; the difference in the same spots when seen first by daylight and then visited at night; the self-reliance which the wildfowl shooter must place upon his individual resources, and his perpetual struggle against all the elements combined—everything tends to make of the pursuit one which I have no hesitation in calling the most manly and the most fascinating of all the pursuits which the sportsman may addict himself to.

Well, I propose to go through the various expedients now employed to overreach the fowl, and, whenever desirable, illustrations shall accompany my text. I intend doing my best to describe a sport which has been always very dear to me, and, if I succeed in interesting my readers, my object will be attained.

As punting is the most important branch of wildfowling, I shall begin with it.

Punt-shooting can be carried on in two manners: firstly, with heavy punt guns which are rigged in various ways (of which ways more hereafter), on the punts; and, secondly, with heavy shoulder guns. In both cases, however, light guns—wherewith to polish off the cripples—are a *sine quâ non*. The latter guns, indeed, are, from their use, referred to invariably as “cripple” guns by all wildfowl shooters.

Naturally, a great deal more execution is done with punt guns than with heavy shoulder guns—hence punt-gun shooting proper will first occupy my attention, and I will forthwith enter into a description of punt guns and their requisites, beginning, of course, with the oldest forms of punt guns.

---

## CHAPTER I.

### MUZZLE-LOADING PUNT GUNS.

(FLINT, PERCUSSION, AND COPPER TUBE  
IGNITION.)

---

THE revolution in sporting guns, which was brought about by the invention and introduction of our modern breechloaders, was in no case a more welcome and more sterlingly genuine improvement than where wild-fowl guns were concerned—especially punt and stanchion guns. A brief retrospect of the inconveniences of the old swivel guns used for punting or for yacht-gunning purposes will here be desirable, as it will bring the advantages of their modern congeners into bolder relief.

And, first, the old flint-lock punt guns were a terrible nuisance. In spite of a waterproof leather covering—which was technically called a “cap,” and which fitted accurately over the hammer and pan, so as to prevent rain, snow, or spray from directly affecting the powder—it frequently happened that salt water, dashed into spray by the wind, flew even underneath the cap and spoilt the priming. And even when the weather was tolerably clear, the sea air soon affected the exposed powder; and hence many missfires would occur, notwithstanding all precautions to the contrary, unless the gun, when going to be fired, were re-primed there and then as a matter of course, if it had been standing about loaded any length of time. Strange to say, however, some of the old school of puntmen will tell you that their flint locks had a great advantage, which more than counterbalanced their defects, over the percussion or breechloading guns of the same kind, in this wise: they aver that with the old flash-in-the-

pan better execution was done in the ranks of the fowl, because, when pulling the trigger, there was a short period of "hang fire," which partly "rose" the birds for flight, and thus insured their offering a larger surface to the shot. The gun, then, I need not add, had to be "set," or aimed, high. Be that as it may, a shrill whistle or a loud call on the part of the modern puntsman, who uses a percussion-tube ignition or breech-loading punt gun, will bring about the same result, i.e., that of getting the birds just on the rise when the trigger is pulled, and a lane is cut into their rising ranks. Therefore, really the so-called advantage of the flint-lock punt gun over the percussion or breechloading implement is of no importance whatsoever, notwithstanding what the old puntsmen may say; and its chances of missfire were not to be overlooked.

Indeed, the only case in which I could see any advantage in the use of flint at all, was when Col. Hawker built his now notorious and very ingenious double-barrelled punt gun. One of the barrels was fired by the flint system, the other by the percussion plan; and he argued, rightly, that its execution was better than would have been the case with a single-barrel gun carrying the same dose of shot, since the birds, rising to the first barrel acting upon them, were cut down by the other and slower barrel, showering lead, too, upon their ranks, when they were fairly on the wing; and, since its barrels necessarily placed their shot side by side to some extent, thereby cutting two lanes instead of one in the flocks. That gun was very heavy, and had both a steel spring apparatus and a rope breeching. I have never seen a similar gun, and do not know whether there is any such now in use. The idea was good as regards killing, but if ever a modern wildfowler should set up a double-barrelled breechloading punt gun, what a storm of abuse would be showered upon him by those who would be even afraid of going into a punt! In the Colonel's time he was praised for his invention. Now, such a thing would raise a niceish hornet's nest, I am pretty certain. *Autres temps, autres mœurs!*

Howbeit, the flint system being found troublesome was discarded eventually by all puntsmen, and the copper tube and

percussion plans were then introduced, when various systems of each were tried in different localities, and they proved most decidedly an improvement on the flint-lock system, especially because the powder was not so liable to be attacked by the dampness of the sea air. But still, in the long run, the powder, especially in the nipples of percussion guns, will become affected, unless special precautions, which will be by and bye carefully described, are taken, and even then, I have found it many times absolutely necessary to renew, not only the priming, but even the cap, of the several muzzleloading punt guns with which I have at various times followed the birds.

The copper tube ignition was far better *when the tubes were right*, for certain and quick ignition, since it is the only method among muzzle loaders that requires no priming, and this is a great recommendation in itself. But then, as a rule, tubes were so bad and so difficult to procure that most people had to give up the system. Indeed, one sportsman averred that he only knew of *one* shop where tubes were to be got, after many fruitless inquiries from all the gunmakers in the kingdom. Howbeit, for the convenience of those of my readers who may be now using these tubes, I may recommend them Mr. J. Patstone, of Southampton; and Messrs. Moore and Grey, of 43, Old Bond-street, London. These two firms make of tubes a *spécialité*, and I have heard most favourably of their copper primers from several puntsmen. But, as I have already stated, so bad were tubes for a considerable period, that the tube ignition guns have come to be all but disused nowadays, and most modern muzzle-loading punt guns that are now built, are built to take percussion caps.

As regards the latter, a clever device has been resorted to by a well-known sportsman in order to prevent missfires in his percussion punt gun. This gentleman, whose skill as a punter is notorious, has planned having a somewhat larger chamber than usual, and two nipples, instead of one, are screwed on the chamber. Ordinary punt-gun caps are used, and the hammer, being double-headed, strikes both caps at one and the same time. The advantages of this plan are

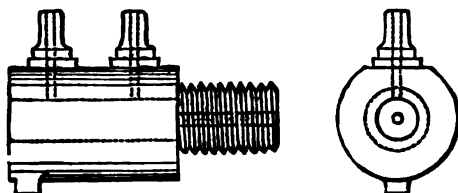
eminently satisfactory and obvious. If both caps explode, well and good; but should one of the caps miss fire, or its priming, having got damp, hang fire, anyhow the chances are greatly in favour of the other cap and its priming being all right; and thus the gun will go off, almost to a dead certainty, without any delay or mishap. This is certainly an improvement in the right direction. The sportsman above alluded to also proposes to use tow in the vent hole of the chamber, arguing that when the explosion takes place, the tow, being elastic, will deaden the sudden recoil somewhat. I cannot follow him there, however, as I think that the only advantage to be derived by plugging the vent hole with tow would be merely to avoid the very slight waste of driving power which may escape through the vent hole; and if it were desirable to avoid that escape of gas, why not build the gun without a vent hole?

A description of such a double-ignition gun having been given, at full length in the *Field*, by another correspondent who wrote under the *nom de plume* "Skolopax," I append it here for my readers' information. "Skolopax" said:

My present gun is the sixth which I have had in the course of forty-five years. The first three were on the old percussion principle, consequently subject to miss fire when it was most important that they should go off; so I discarded them, and was determined to have a piece of perfection, if possible. I accordingly wrote to the celebrated Col. Hawker, stated my case, and asked for his advice. I had a very kind letter from him, in which he recommended a side primer, and volunteered to order my gun and to superintend its manufacture. Well, in the course of three months the gun arrived, and a beautiful article it was, but not so perfect as I had expected; the side primers were subject to miss fire, though not so often as the old caps, and in addition to this annoyance, by accident I discovered that the breech (a plug breech) had become so loose that water freely ran out of it when the gun was washed. The discovery by washing—a most unnecessary operation now—may have saved my life, for, had I persevered in using the gun in this defective state, I might not now be able to tell the story. So I sent it back to the man, who was full of apologies, and he returned it after a few weeks with a patent breech, which rendered the gun perfectly secure. Still it was a side primer, and subject to miss fire. I now conceived that if I could fire a little shot into my charge by some external fixture and certain ignition, there would be an end to my failures, and my hope of effecting a certainty might be accomplished, so I had a plug screwed into the breech of the gun, with a hole drilled



through it communicating with the charge. The dotted lines show the external hole, which received a peg of wood, and the dotted lines on the screw show the size of the hole through it, which was large enough to admit a small knitting needle. The external hole, as we may call it, was  $\frac{1}{2}$  in. in diameter, and the internal one through the screw only quarter that size. On the top were fixed two musket nipples; underneath was a little spud inserted, to be received into a corresponding notch in a key, to screw



the "diplopuron" in and out. This name was given to the plug by an old classical friend of mine, and, being a double ignition, and so appropriate, I still retain it. Imagine now your gun loaded, being a muzzle-loader, and the diplopuron screwed into its place in the breech; you have only, with a small powder flask that will fit into the vest pocket, to turn the gun on its side and prime it with fine powder; then turn it a little more, with the nipples downwards, and the cock of the gun resting on them, so as to let the powder into the nipples, that it may be seen when turned upwards; then fill up the hole again with powder to make up for that which ran into the nipples, and drive a peg into it with a tap of the powder horn, and with a pair of musket caps you are ready for a shot, and you may bet 100 to 1 that you shall not have a miss fire. All this act of priming, so tediously described here, is only the act of a few seconds when one is accustomed to it. The pegs, too, are easily made. Take a stick of hard wood—sycamore, beech, or witch elm—and saw slices off the end five-eighths of an inch thick; then with a saddler's punch, the exact size required to be a tight fit for the hole, punch out your pegs as if you were cutting wadding, and you will make some hundreds of them in half an hour. It may be mentioned here that the screwed end of the dip, where it comes in contact with the charge, should be "bushed" with platina, otherwise, after lying by for a season, it may become choked with rust, and after some seasons it may become enlarged and allow too much gas to escape. This word is evidently of French extraction, and should be spelled "bouchéd," from the word "boucher," to stop up.

My present gun has been in use about twenty-five years, and has never had a missfire during that time. It has a short, stout rosewood stock, 14 in. long; its whole length is 10 ft. 5 in.; length of barrel, including patent breech, 9 ft. 3 in., and whole weight of gun 16 lb.; the bore  $1\frac{1}{2}$  in., well relieved from 15 in. at the breech end, and the same at the other end, so that it is what would now be called a choke-bore, though no such phraseology was known in that day. The circumference at the breech is 13  $\frac{1}{2}$  in., and at the muzzle 7  $\frac{1}{2}$  in.; it is mounted with a trunnion 15 in. from the

breech, and now takes a charge of 5oz. of powder, and 1½lb. of shot—BB—never changed, except when SSSG may be used for geese, which is but seldom. The charge used to be 5½oz. of powder and 2lb. of shot; but when birds became diminished in our bay we reduced the charge.

The barrel was forged and bored by Marsh, of Birmingham, who executed his order to perfection. The breech was ordered to be sent over unbored, but screwed, and weighed 16lb., with a projection at the end of it 3½in. long, 1½in. broad at the upper surface, and 2½in. deep, the angles all square; the length of the screw, 1½in. It was then bored the required depth with a ½in. bit, and rimed out with a fluted steel cone, which left it the shape of a V, taking care to leave it strong—that is, not to interfere with the strength of the screw. A recess was cut out of the side of it about ½in. deep, and a hole ½in. in diameter, bored in the side to receive the screw of the dip, being previously carefully tapped. By cutting the recess, the dip does not project beyond the line of the barrel more than ½in., and looks very neat. The lock has rather a broad plate, with ordinary works inside, but with an unusually large cock, the nose broad enough to explode the two caps simultaneously, and the hook an extra length, so that a good gripe may be taken of it, in letting it down from whole cock, when the shooter is lying on his chest. There is no use in having the mainspring too strong; a moderate strength is sufficient to explode two caps, and if stronger there is a danger of it slipping through the fingers when the shooter is lying down, as he has not the same command of his fingers as he has when he is up.

With reference to the “plugging” above referred to, another eminent punter, “Cigarette,” demurred, saying:

I am surprised at “Skolopax” recommending pegs of wood to keep his priming in and stop the vent-hole with. I found they fly out with the force of bullets, so much so that I was obliged to cover the combing where they struck with strong copper; and finally, fearing the danger of a rebound into the eye, I dispensed with them altogether. The way I found best was to cut thin slices off sound bottle corks, and, with a punch slightly larger than the vent-hole, stamp out the plugs. When you have enough made, get them rolled about in some good grease; they fit better than any wood, will not let the wet through, and can do no damage by rebound or otherwise. Another thing: it is a nuisance having to turn the gun over to prime, as to do so you are obliged to unship the breeching. To prime this species of ignition comfortably, get a small pistol powder flask, with the end or muzzle fitted on at nearly right angles, and small enough to just fit into the vent-hole. You can then prime without moving the gun, by merely filling the spout of the flask with powder, inserting it in the vent-hole, and shaking it lightly on drawing out. I quite agree that you never have misfires with this system; but if you want to have a hang-fire, stuff up the nipples with powder, and quite fill the vent-hole.

This criticism brought the following rejoinder by “Skolopax:”

The act of turning the gun on the side to receive the priming, then another half turn to let the powder fall to the top of the nipples, then back again to the side to re-prime or to make up for the powder occupied by the nipples, is a momentary operation; the gun being turned by the boatman, and the shooter doing the priming. The exploded caps are then removed and a slice of cork placed on the nipple, the weight of the cock keeping it down water-tight, until the caps are put on for firing. The peg driven into the hole is also water-tight. The peg of hard wood being first made, and the hole in the plug being drilled by a drill made exactly the proper size, and being forced in, it compresses without "mealing" the powder, and thus causes such resistance in blowing out the peg, that any dirt in the smaller interior hole communicating with the charge must be blown in, and produce a never-failing ignition of the charge, no matter how long the gun may remain charged.

After the gun has been once primed and the priming seen on the top of the nipples, it should never be touched, for fear of "mealing" the powder. My gun at the end of the season has been sometimes left loaded for several weeks, through forgetfulness or neglect, and it has gone off at the end of that time as sharp as it would have done the moment it was primed; and it may have been loaded and primed half an hour after a cripple chase, when the priming chamber must have remained open during the whole of that time.

Some writer has objected to the pegs, because they did not always fit, and preferred soft greased cork wads; but he was not aware that the hole should be drilled for the pegs, and not the pegs made for the hole. This makes the material difference, and makes the explosion so powerful as to drive the fire into the charge through any accumulation of dirt. But the fact is that there never is any dirt whatever in that chamber; a small brass probe, exactly fitting the hole, is used to clean it, and then a small wire is run through the chamber into the breech; but, though we go through the operation of cleaning, we never find any dirt to be removed, and this too after perhaps four or five shots have been fired. This may be the effect of well-stoved powder, both coarse and fine. The gentleman who objected to the use of pegs, from the risk of an accident to the eye, has been labouring under an imaginary impression, as nothing of the kind has ever happened from my gun, after many years' experience. It should be mentioned, that the gun should not be primed until, after being loaded, it has been run back to its position on the crutch; to turn it then is a most simple, easy operation, and the whole operation of priming occupies only a few seconds.

The caps should never be kept on the nipples until the shooter is working up to birds; and if he fails to fire his shot and the birds go off, he should remove the caps and put on the slice of cork.

The priming of the gun in rain or snow should always be done under an umbrella, which takes up little or no room in a canoe; and when removed, a waterproof stout cover should be secured on the lock.

Fancy having to carry an umbrella in a punt! I could never see the fun of this, but, of course, opinions differ. And

admitting that breech-loading punt guns can be made to shoot as well as muzzle-loaders, does it not stand to reason that breech-loaders would always be preferable?

Howbeit, a similar dodge for muzzle-loaders, as regards the "plugging" above alluded to, was advised by Col. Whyte, with the use of ordinary single-chambered punt guns. If, he says, you plug the nipple of such a gun with a piece of dry deal, brought to a point and cut off smooth at the top, no amount of water will have any effect upon it, the capillary attraction being entirely cut off. The explosion of the cap drives in the peg; and, even if the gun be foul, this will explode it when all other measures fail. You may pump on the capped nipple, or leave the gun for hours in water; still, so long as the cap explodes, so will the gun. To insure your cap, put some grease, with a little beeswax in it, on a hot-plate, and put the caps on their ends thereon, and you are safe under all circumstances.

These dodges are well-known to gunners. Unfortunately, it is only in open weather that they can be resorted to; for, when it freezes hard, the punter's fingers are so benumbed that he can hardly pick up the little bits of wood and put them into the nipples, &c., properly, and when it snows or rains there is the possibility of some wet getting into the nipples with the wood plugs. When the plan can be used, it is now and then employed, but puntsmen do not rely always upon it, for the reasons above mentioned. Care should be taken to cut the plug well on a level with the nipple, since, should a fibre of the wood be left protruding over the nipple, it might deaden the blow of the hammer, and the cap would not be exploded.

I have detailed the whole affair for the benefit of those punters who may wish to avail themselves thereof. Almost every wildfowl shooter has some little devices of his own, in some of which great ingenuity is shown, and I think it would be satisfactory and desirable, if such among our brethren of the trigger who feel interested in the subject should communicate to me any desirable improvement of which they may be aware, so as to diffuse this knowledge among the

craft, to our common advantage. I, for one, always feel truly indebted for any wrinkles, as all practical wrinkles are worth knowing in such a difficult pursuit as that of wildfowl shooting.

Of course, one of the chief difficulties connected with ordinary percussion guns is their liability to miss-fire, from the various causes which have already been referred to, but I would beg to point out that, provided the rims of percussion caps be well greased over, or protected in some other fashion when the caps are placed on the nipple, so as to prevent damp air or water from reaching the priming, they will remain good, practically, for a goodish while. Various methods have been resorted to by fowlers in order to waterproof their caps; some rough fishermen are content with tallow, of which they besmear a liberal dose around the rim of the cap on the nipple, and others have some peculiar recipes of their own devising for the same object. A well-known sportsman, "One who has fired 20,000 shots," sends me the following, which he has tried, and has found to give complete immunity from miss-fires: Take two parts of tallow, which should be first melted, and poured into a basin of boiling water, and well stirred in it; by which process, whatever salt may have been used in its manufacture, will be thoroughly extracted if allowed to stand and get cold. To these two parts of tallow add one part of beeswax: when melted add a little neatsfoot or castor oil, and well mix. (The oil is not absolutely necessary, but it keeps the compound soft in cold weather.) When needed for use let the sportsman take a small quantity of this salve, and melt it in the lid of a cap box, which will be most handy and convenient. Just enough should be put therein to stand barely one-eighth of an inch deep. In this, dip the open ends of the caps, and then put them on a paper, open ends downwards, to cool. When cool, wipe the grease from the outside. Now, when using these caps, care should be taken that no salve should get into the hole of the nipple; and, by pressing the caps down, the salve will so fill up any interstices between the nipple and the caps as to preclude the possibility of any air or damp getting access to the powder or cap. "One who has fired 20,000 shots" adds that he has

known ordinary muzzle-loaders thus treated left for two or three weeks in the worst weather, both ashore and afloat, and they went off then as well as when first loaded, and he does not recollect a single instance of miss-fire or hang-fire when proper care had been taken in loading.

This is a wrinkle worth knowing, I therefore give it in its entirety; and, in the name of punt gunners and wildfowl shooters, I beg to thank the writer for this most valuable recipe.

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## CHAPTER II.

### MUZZLE-LOADING PUNT GUNS

*(Continued).*

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Now, ordinary nipple-and-cap muzzle-loaders being thus rendered almost totally water and weather proof, the only question remaining to be attended to is to have the priming well done. This is best secured by mixing small-grained with coarse-grained powder, and placing a liberal dose of small-grained on the top of the load in the loading scoop, when it will be found that by turning and shaking the barrel the smaller-grained powder will readily fall into and fill up the nipple.

Our home professionals stick to muzzle-loading punt guns simply because they cost less to purchase than the breech-loading patterns, in which they cannot afford to invest. Abroad, the fear of running short of the old paper cartridge cases, which could not be there easily replaced, induces the puntsmen to still use the now old-fashioned cap and nipple, or primer, plans, but, I cannot myself understand why muzzle-loading punt guns should be manufactured now at all, considering that the difference in prices between the muzzle-loading and breech-loading systems is, on the whole, so small, that surely the very many patent advantages of the latter over the former ought to far more than counterbalance the extra outlay. And, as regards the cartridge cases, half a dozen good modern steel cases will fire each hundreds of shots, and they therefore, to all intents and purposes, are all that can be desired, provided the guns are bored with a chamber.

However, as it often happens that second-hand muzzle-loading punt guns get in the market, besides those that are still



being manufactured, it will be well to explain the *modus operandi* to be adopted with such implements.

Those who make punting their business, used, and generally use still, for very heavy guns, Col. Hawker's specially devised ramrod and loader, of which a short description will here be desirable. It consists of a ramrod, flat at one end, and provided at the other with a brass scoop\* small enough in circumference to easily go down the barrel, and yet long enough to contain the powder, by which means, without raising the heavy guns much, the powder can be sent home. But the loading, notwithstanding, is always somewhat defective, and as a matter of practical use I have never found the scoop a perfect cure; for, if the puntsman mixes his powders, the wind blows off half the smaller-grained powder as a rule, or when it is raining or snowing the powder gets wet in the scoop. Allowance, therefore, has to be made for all this when loading. The scoop, however, is very handy, so far as it goes, since, when the guns can but be raised very slightly, it would be impossible almost to get the powder home at all, in the ordinary way of loading muzzle-loaders.

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\* In reference to this, when it appeared in the *Field*, Mr. E. T. Booth wrote:—"I notice, in 'Wildfowler's' description of Col. Hawker's loading spoon, he states that the metal should be brass. In the gallant colonel's work no mention is made of the material, and this omission might have caused a serious accident had the mistake not been observed. Some years ago, thinking I would try one of these implements, I ordered my punt men to get one made according to the instructions, giving them my book (Col. Hawker's eleventh edition), so that there should be no mistake. A few mornings afterwards, on arriving at the punts, I was informed that the new loading apparatus was finished. It was so dark that I could not see even the slightest outline of the machine, but I ordered the men before loading to try it down the barrel, to see if it would fit the whole way to the chamber. Happening to be a little ahead of the muzzle of the gun when they withdrew the rod, I noticed that the whole barrel was a blaze of light inside; and, on examining the spoon, I discovered that the material it was composed of was either iron or steel. The smith who had made it, and my three punt men (by trade two old professional gunners and a ship's carpenter), had all been used to their various departments for years; so how such a ridiculous affair can have happened I am at a loss to imagine.

"E. T. BOOTH.

"Dyke-road, Brighton, Nov. 11, 1878."

Concerning this loading of long muzzle-loaders, when I first began punting, and was not up to the various wrinkles now in use, I was much exercised in my mind as to how best to proceed in order to insure the powder getting true home in a very long-barrelled 90-pounder I once had; for, with all the care imaginable, when loading in the punt, in turning the scoop round in the barrel, yet the powder would of course to some extent lie "whistle-shape," since the barrel had to be held slantingly when ramming the powder wad home. Now I remedied that in the following simple manner. I cut out of ordinary playing cards with a punt gun wad cutter a lot of what I may call wads, but very thin ones, since they were only each of the thickness of a playing card (and here I must state that the wad cutter I used was a bit big, the reason for why will presently appear).

Now, when loading, I used to thrust the powder home with the scoop; then I withdrew the scoop, inserted one of the thin card wads in the barrel, and with the flat end of the ramrod, which was very nearly of the diameter of the barrel, I gently pushed it down, nearly, but not quite, on the powder. When it was nearly on the top of it, I raised the gun perpendicularly in the punt with both hands, leaving the ramrod in the barrel. I then tapped the barrel hard with my hand, and shook it, so as to set the pebble powder level; and by the same tapping and shaking, the heavy ramrod pressing down the thin wad, placed it flat against the powder. I then could lower the gun barrel, insert an ordinary thick wad of oakum wadding, and ram it home—the powder was right enough, as the tight-fitting thin cardboard wad would keep it in its true shape at the bottom of the barrel. I commend that plan to users of not too heavy but long-barrelled muzzle-loading punt guns, who wish to load at sea in light punts. The only precautions to be taken are to have the thin wads just a bit wide for the barrel, and that they go down flat, and not edgeways. This is readily perceived by the way the ramrod goes down, and also by the sound of the cards scraping along the barrel as they are driven slowly towards the powder by the weight of the ramrod.

"Skolopax" loads his muzzle-loading gun as follows:

We have four chargers of brass tubing, suiting the size of the bore, with a copper bottom soldered into one end, and a strong eye about half an inch in diameter. Taper plugs of hard wood are turned to fit them, so as to be air-tight when charged with powder. They should be so long that, when the charge of powder is in them, it shall not come within three inches of the top. The object of this extra length is to prevent the powder falling out when the charger is in a horizontal position. A long light rod is provided, of American elm, with a copper hook securely driven into the end of it. The gun being in a horizontal position, the charger is introduced, hooked on the rod, and gently moved down until it touches the breech. It is then withdrawn about four inches, and, with half a dozen sharp jerks with the hand, the powder is shot into the breech. A lump of oakum, elongated so that it shall go down freely into the gun, is then rammed down securely by another strong rod, so that by ramming, the wad effectually becomes shaped, as if it was made in a machine, and prevents all windage. The cartridge, made up securely in brown paper, is next rammed down. You prime the gun as before described, place it on the crutch, and you are ready for a shot.

An excellent dodge is also resorted to by another sportsman, who wrote :

I have a small mould of hard wood tapering to about half its diameter at one end, and about four inches long, and the size of the bore of the gun. Round this I wrap thin tissue paper—in fact, make a cartridge case—something similar to the one for shot. This case has then the proper charge of powder put in it; the top and bottom are tied up with fine waxed silk, and each cartridge is kept in a small tin box, just fitting it, all by itself. To load, I put the thin end down the barrel first. When at the breech end of the gun (as shown by a mark on the ramrod) I give the cartridge a smart blow with the ramrod, which has the effect of bursting the case at the smaller end, and of sending the powder well into the centre hole. I take one charge out of its separate box, and pop it in in a moment, and of course without wetting any of the others, or itself either. It makes loading for a muzzle-loader easy work compared to all the bother of measuring out a charge there and then, as is usually done.

This is an admirable plan, and here is another which was given by another eminent sportsman who uses a tube-ignition gun: "I get small bags of thin silk crape, of a size to fit the bore of the gun accurately; in them I put the requisite charge of powder, and tie up the top with a bit of silk or worsted. The tube would always ignite the powder through the crape, and there was not the least difficulty in drawing the charge, using, of course, a brass worm at the end of the rod." By this means the gun can be loaded any distance from the

shore, if it can be at all handled, but this is not always the case, and by far the greatest disadvantage inherent to heavy muzzle-loading punt guns arises from the fact that the shooter has but too often to row ashore after each shot, in order to reload his implement in safety. This he could not always do if he remained afloat, because the weapon, if very heavy and cumbersome, would, to a certainty, upset his light craft and send him to the bottom. Therefore, in such a case, no matter how far the sportsman is from the shore or the flats, before he can hope to have another shot he must run his punt aground somewhere. Now, this in itself is no treat, as I can personally testify. However, when the gun is not of too formidable a size, the loading itself, when once aground, offers no very great difficulties. But when the gun is a regular working tool, then it takes a great deal of care to load it satisfactorily; for, on account of its great length, the powder and shot are apt to lie whistle-shaped in the barrel, and the next shot, accordingly, would do anything but what it might have done. Besides which, the unshipping and reshipping or turning of the gun on its crutch is always a nuisance. It has generally to be done in semi-darkness, and the "trimming" of the boat is apt to be upset somehow; besides which, the rope-breeching has to be carefully looked to afterwards, when a patent recoil apparatus is not used.

But, of course, this rowing ashore has not always to be resorted to, for, there are punts and punts, and there are also punt guns and punt guns; and there are in use, on some parts of the coast, very roomy and seaworthy punts, in which the stability is quite sufficient to enable the sportsmen to reload any ordinary muzzle-loading punt guns in safety without going ashore to a flat. But for half a dozen such roomy and stable punts there are hundreds in which it would be unsafe to try the experiment, and in fact in which it is never even attempted, the craft being too light, and the guns too cumbersome in proportion thereto. In short, loading muzzle-loading punt guns in punts is really the exception to the general rule; and it is evident that it must depend entirely upon the respective sizes of the punts, and the weight and length of the guns.

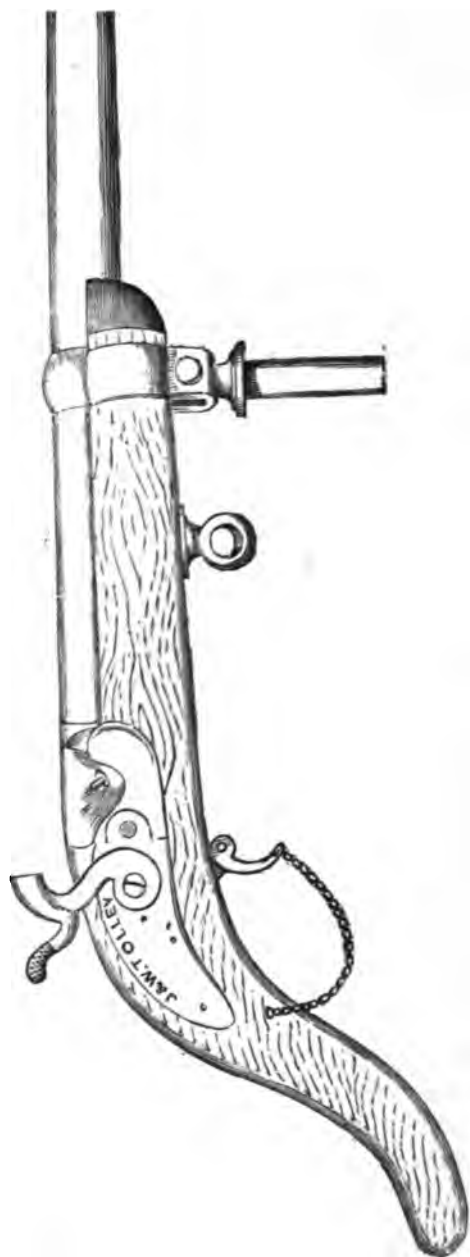
In fact, it will be found that it is almost exclusively only in those large punts which are "sculled," that loading muzzle-loader punt guns is possible. In a small punt used with paddles the feat would be, not perhaps impossible, but extremely hazardous, and, generally speaking, it is not performed until the punt is rowed ashore for safety, unless one gets his gun to lie in a crutch which is lifted by a thread screw, as then, after firing, one has simply to turn the gun round on its centre of gravity, and load it comfortably inside the punt without unshipping it at all; but all this requires great care and tact—especially in the dark. In double-handed punts, of course, loading is easier, on account of the greater room and stability of the craft, and there two hands can attend to the work. But as there are hundreds of small punts to one double-handed punt or sculling punt, and as most guns are not used with a lifting crutch, I think I am justified in saying that, generally speaking, having to row ashore to reload is one of the characteristic nuisances of muzzle-loading punt guns; when pointing out, in a summary way, the defects of muzzle-loaders. It is, however, but fair to mention those few cases wherein it is unnecessary (with due caution) to leave deep water and seek the land for safety when wishing to reload; and I trust my explanations will be satisfactory to those few ardent lovers of muzzle-loading punt guns, whose punts are so built, and whose guns are so rigged, that they need experience no great delay or difficulty in loading.

Nevertheless, from all this it will be seen that, even with the best of appliances, muzzle-loading punt guns are awkward things to handle. Indeed, the whole affair had to be very clumsily worked; but now *nous avons changé tout cela*—the breech-loading punt gun is rigged on its recoil frame, or with its rope breeching, and the boat is accurately trimmed before starting, and the wildfowler has only to open the breech of his Snider or patent punt gun, shove in his cartridge, close the breech, and there he is—ready for any emergency, for any weather, for any length of time. His steel or paper cartridges are totally weather-proof; his loads are ready-prepared in the ammunition box. As soon as a shot is fired, he can shove in

another cartridge ; there is no need to row ashore, and therefore no waste of time ; his loads are always level in the cartridges, therefore he fires " true " shots, kills more birds, and wastes no ammunition. Then he has no occasion to stand up to load, and thereby puts an end to the most fruitful source of upsets. Altogether, then, when rigged out in that style, punting is an undeniable treat—when the birds are there, *cela s'entend*.

Now, a strong partizan of muzzle-loaders objected to these latter views of mine, and stated, " That, when punting—(1) one does not require to load quickly ; (2) as to the loading without showing yourself, or raising your head, what was the good of that ? (3) The duck will not wait for another shot," &c.

To these objections, which are right in the main, I simply reply that, in the hard winter 1870-71, one evening, by moonlight, I fired two shots running from a punt gun, at wigeon. This is unusual, but it was so. After my first shot the birds flew up, but some—or else " strangers"—came back, and settled near the cripples, when I had another rake at them. *Ergo*, (1) had I not been able to reload quickly, (2) had I shown myself when loading, (3) had I even raised my head, I should have lost my second shot. This, however, does not often occur with wigeon, and rarely or never with ducks. Still, it is better to be prepared ; and, as regards curlews and shore birds, it is well-known that, in many cases, some of them will settle again near the dead birds and specially near the " cripples " if they cannot see the gunner, and even in the latter case they will occasionally do so. I have actually shot shore birds when tramping on " saltings," and whilst reloading—standing in the open marsh, mind—the rest of the scared flock have come back, and some have settled again within forty yards of me ; and, need I add, were well peppered for their trouble. Whimbrels, young curlews, young oyster catchers, &c., are especially addicted to that sort of thing ; but that wigeon will occasionally do it too, my experience, though showing only one instance, tends to prove. *Ergo*, if duck will not wait for another shot, wigeon may, and big shore birds will come back, and they all might be scared from settling near if they saw the gunner.



Messrs. TOLLEY'S MUZZLE-LOADING PUNT GUN.

In short, my argument is, that the sport is so arduous that everything should be done which is to be conducive of success; and silence, absence of motion, and as complete screening as possible of the gunner's whereabouts, are among the many *desiderata* of the sport. These the breechloading guns greatly tend to insure, hence my advocacy of their use; but their improvement is greatly to be desired. At any rate, I think it will be admitted that I shall have held the balance pretty evenly and impartially between the "muzzle" and the "breech" systems; but, of course, the latter is as bound to become exclusively the punt gun of the future as shoulder breech-loaders have superseded the use of muzzle-loaders in the stubble and in covert.

Still, for those various reasons to which I have alluded, muzzle guns are still being built, and I, therefore, must deal with them.

All punt guns, breech or muzzle-loaders, but particularly muzzle-loaders, should have a "cap." This cap is made of oilskin or leather, lined with flannel, and fits over the breech end, covering the hammer, nipple, and lock in the one case, or the hammer, lock, and action in the other.

This cap should be left on the gun during service, until the gun is actually required to be fired.

When a punting expedition is over it will be well to at once unload, clean, wipe, and oil the gun, and then to cover it over—barrel, recoil spring, and stock—with an oilskin cover. If this cover is also lined with coarse flannel, all the better.

The cut on page 20 shows a specimen of the muzzle-loading punt guns which are manufactured by Messrs. J. and W. Tolley, of Birmingham. The gun here shown is fitted with a simple swivel and a breeching ring; its stock is of the curved pattern—to slip under the arm pit—and its trigger has the chain which in some guns is replaced by a knotted leather string.

For prices of guns built on this system, I beg to refer my readers to the price list which will be found in Chapter IV.

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## CHAPTER III.

### MUZZLE-LOADING PUNT GUNS.

*(Continued.)*

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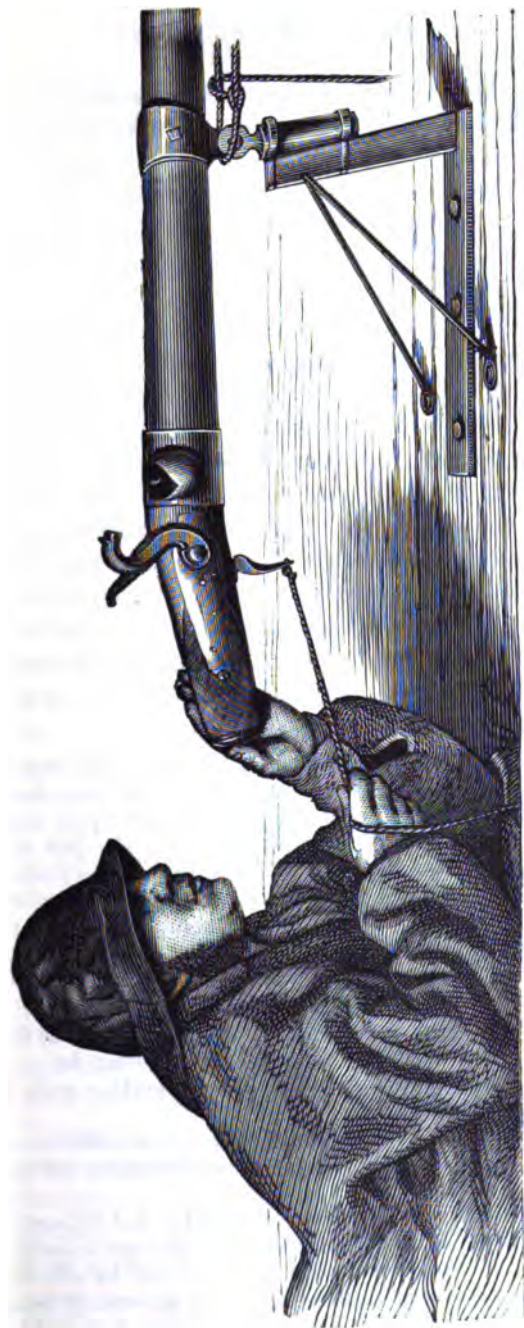
THERE are many puntsmen who, disliking curved stocks as shown page 20, resort to what are called pistol-stocked punt guns.

The length of stock is about 6in. or 7in., or even less, and if the stock of the gun shown on page 20 were cut off just where the ring or hook is fixed which holds the trigger string, it would be about the length of a pistol stock. A gun of this description ought to be evenly balanced on the swivel; the left hand then rests on the stock at about the distance of 12in. or 15in. from the cheek, and, owing to the ease with which the muzzle can be worked—by the simple movement of the left hand—over either bow, a much greater space can be covered than is possible with a gun which is fired from the shoulder or under the arm.

The cut in next page, taken partly from a photo kindly sent me by Mr. E. T. Booth, will show, at a glance, how pistol-stocked guns are built, and handled.

The gun, as will be perceived, looks like an ordinary punt gun, whose stock should have been abruptly sawn off at the grip two inches or so behind the lock. The gunner, with his left hand, regulates the line of aim, whilst, with his right, he is ready with the trigger string.

For the purpose of having the photo taken, the gun had been rigged simply on a block of wood; but, from Mr. Booth's letters, I gather the facts that he uses the gun with a knee,



**MR. E. T. BOOTH'S PISTOL-STOCKED PUNT GUN, WITH KNEE AND ROPE-BREECHING.**

into which fits the swivel pin, and, in order to relieve the strain on the knee, and to check the recoil of the gun, he uses a rope breeching with a single eye, which is made fast round the bolt. The cut shows all this, but, it will be perceived that the knee, in the cut, is evidently placed nearer the stock than it can be actually in the gun. Want of room is the apology for this slight defect in the illustration.

Mr. Booth says that he believes the rope breeching to be quite unnecessary with a strong, carefully constructed knee, and a well-built punt; but, as he rightly adds, "it gives confidence, and, would be useful in case of a mishap." Then he goes on to say: "I have often, when in a hurry, fired without using it, and never found any injury done to the punts." Then the punts must have been exceptionally well built. I have no hesitation in saying that nine out of ten of the punts now in use would have given way, perhaps not at the first shot, but certainly before a round dozen had been fired.

However, I will give Mr. Booth's own particulars of his gun, as they are sure to be interesting to all punt gunners. He says :

My gun is a muzzle loader, including stock, about 10ft. long; bore, not quite 1½in.; weight, nearly 100lb. The charges I use vary from 14oz. to 18oz. of shot, with powder (Col. Hawker's grain for punt guns—Curtis and Harvey's), a rather larger quantity in bulk. The part that I want to draw notice to, is, however, the stock. The aim can (owing to short stock) be easily regulated for flying or sitting shots by the simple movement of the left arm; the gun being evenly balanced on the swivel, there is no weight on the hand. It will also be perceived that I do away with the long wood stock that goes half-way up the barrel in Tolley's guns.

I do not use any rest or crutch, always working the gun by the left hand. When not in use I fasten the butt of the gun down under the deck on the port side; this gives the floor of the punt free for rowing, &c.

I have tried numbers of different methods for working guns, but never found any so handy as this.

Guns are often found to strain punts, but punts, as a rule, are very badly built. I do not in *all* cases refer to bad workmanship, but the want of experience in the architect.

The great stress laid by former writers (Hawker and Folkard) upon the trim is perfectly useless with a gun of this kind that can be easily regulated for every shot. A fixed gun in a rest is all very well for still deep water, but when a punt is among shallows, constantly aground, or being shoved over mud banks ("crowded" is the professional term) up to birds, some-

times up a bank, and then down, with the gunner prepared to fire at any moment, he could not, unless able to swing his gun, be able to take aim with any certainty, unless provided with an instrument to determine if his punt was on the right level.

Exactly so; hence the vast majority of gunners fire only "set" shots when afloat, and when they do, by chance, fire when aground, or otherwise, at flying birds, it is a matter of uncertainty whether the shots will be very successful, or only passably so, simply because their guns are not so handy as Mr. Booth's. Still, there are some men who are wonderfully clever at that game, through long habit and plenty of practice with their guns, and Mr. E. T. Booth, who is an artist at punting work, and whose fame is world-wide, adds that it is quite as easy to knock down even a single fowl on the wing at eighty or ninety yards with his punt gun as it would be to kill one at twenty-five yards with an ordinary fowling piece. All fowl are so much more exposed when on the wing, added to which in rough weather there is no danger of a wave taking off a part of the shot, and he wonders that shooting flying is not more usually practised.

But, then, pistol-stock guns are not as yet in very general use, though they may become very popular, and probably will be so, judging from Mr. Booth's, Mr. Everitt's, and other punters' praise of them, which praise, coming from such successful puntsmen, deserves all consideration. But it must be also admitted that to anyone accustomed to either the curved or the padded stock, the pistol-stock must at first appear awkward; it would to me. I have never fired a pistol-stock punt gun, I have seen only two in use, and, judging from their appearance—which was so much against what I was accustomed to—I imagined that it would, on my part at any rate, require considerable practice to get into the way of neatly handling them. It may be sheer fancy, but when manœuvring such a heavy weapon as a punt gun, I like somehow to feel all its whereabouts as regards those parts nearest to me. Sheer habit, no doubt, but if the usual stock were absent, and I were shooting at night, I would, figuratively speaking, feel all at sea. I quite understand that Mr. Booth, being used to the style of stock he advocates, finds it answers admirably; but

I repeat it, I have had no experience myself of the plan, and, of course I can only speak personally of what I know practically. In Col. Hawker's book a cut of a punt gun with a sort of pistol stock, is shown at page 388, eleventh edition. That gun is fitted with a recoil spring and swivel, and, certainly for quick work, such as flying shots, nothing could be better whenever the shooter is capable of really shooting well on the wing. Now, I have often shot shore birds on the wing with a punt gun, but that is comparatively easy, as they fly low and along the water, and three or four times I have even succeeded in flooring wigeon and ducks on the wing by cross shots; but I must candidly admit that these successful shots of mine were certainly in the proportion of one to five or more to the unsuccessful ones; and, as regards single birds, I am certain I could not kill one fowl, singly, on the wing, with a punt gun. Leastways, I have never tried it, but I feel I could not do it, if I may so express myself. It is perfectly feasible, of course; indeed, it has been done many times doubtless, but I have never even attempted it, fearing lest it should be a waste of ammunition, and would, moreover, probably disturb another more important and more likely shot. But what I want to, especially, point out, is that (with a breeching rope and crutches especially), the difficulties of a flying shot are very great, and for one such shot, the professionals will have a score or more of "set" shots by simply paddling or sculling to sitting birds, and firing when they just rise. With a pistol stock, a swivel and recoil spring, considerable play is certainly given to the gun—a vast deal more than by the old style—which accounts for the excellent flying practice referred to by Mr. Booth. Of course, he then has to sight for every shot, but on a dark night, if a small trip of birds is found, what with the motion of the sea and the gun not being "set" at all, it must be delicate work to get dead on, quickly. Moreover, a gun thus rigged, to be fired true, must be exceedingly well balanced on its swivel, in order to be easily handled; and in rough weather if the punt is much shaken, how to hold it pretty straight, without a rest, I fear would puzzle me. However, it is a matter of knack and

practice, I suppose. Still, the skill and coolness of the shooter must be very great if the shots are generally successful, since not only must the gun be raised, but a considerable and very variable allowance must also be made for the speed at which the birds are travelling—especially if, when they present a cross shot, they are at full speed. As far as I have experienced, the only pretty tolerably certain flying shots of mine were those had by tilting the gun at the birds when the flocks rose, at long range, whilst being paddled or sculled to. Beyond these, all my other successful flying cross shots were, more or less, flukes and lucky hits. On the other hand, as pointed out, long habit had made me, to a great extent, dependent almost exclusively on “set” shots; hence perhaps my want of success in the other line.

As regards shouldering punt guns, Mr. Folkard, it seems, has still stronger opinions than I have. He says, “Always shoulder your punt guns;” but he appears to have fired generally smallish loads. Howbeit, I do not go the length of advocating *invariably* the shouldering of punt guns, but I certainly like to feel the butt end of my gun somehow, either on my shoulder and breast or under my arm, and find the stock in either case (either padded or curved) no inconvenience.

There is yet another style of punt gun, which is called the bootjack. This gun was described by S. S. G., a correspondent, as having—

A pistol stock and a wedge of wood about nine inches by twenty-two working in it; the thick end of the wedge is cut so as to ship into the stock, and is fastened with a pin; the thin end drops on the bottom boards. The gun is laid so that it can be raised by slightly pressing the chest on the wedge-shaped piece, and when fired, it comes under the punter about seven or eight inches.

The advantages of the bootjack principle (said the correspondent above referred to), are:

First, the gun can be tipped without using a hand, so that whilst your trigger-hand is coming in, you can be tipping the gun; secondly, there is no strain whatever on the punt, which may consequently be built as light as possible—a great consideration in those harbours where the gunner has occasionally to drag his punt long distances over the dry.

## CHAPTER IV.

### BREECH-LOADING PUNT GUNS.

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MODERN breechloading punt guns may be, and are, built of any size, the boats to carry them being the main consideration in the matter. Thus, for large yachts, stanchion guns of enormous sizes are occasionally manufactured; but for punts, canoes, or dinghies, anything above 1½ in.-bore is somewhat out of the common. This will readily be understood if the reader will glance at the following table of weights which has been sent me by Messrs. J. and W. Tolley, of St. Mary's-square, Birmingham, who have hitherto supplied my wildfowl guns.

PUNT GUNS.

Bore.	Weight.	Shot.	Powder.	Length of barrel.
1½ inch.	65lb.	½lb.	Same bulk as the shot.	7 to 8 feet.
1¼ inch.	70lb.	¾lb.		7 feet is the
1½ inch.	93lb.	1lb.		ordinary
1½ inch, &c.				length.

From the foregoing, it will be seen that for a punt, at any rate, a 1½ in. gun is as heavy a weapon as may be desirable. It will carry any load of shot up to 1lb., and such a load as the latter will be equal to almost any emergency. Therefore, as a general rule, it will be found that punt guns of 1½ in. bores, of modern breechloading patterns, have the pull in numbers over all the other sizes; and guns of a larger bore are but rarely

built, except to particular orders, and then when intended for some heavy craft, in which case there is no practical limit to their size, since cartridge cases for any bore can readily be turned out. These cases are made of paper or of steel, and the latter may be re-loaded practically any number of times. They have, moreover, the advantage of being thrust in the breech and pulled out easily, and this is not always the case with paper cartridges, since some of these are apt to bulge if they get at all wet or damp, and when fired, what remains of the empty cases in the breech has a knack of sticking in, in spite of all the gunner's efforts to the contrary.

I now give a comparative table of the prices respectively of muzzle-loading, pin-fire, and central-fire punt guns from 1½ in. to 1½ in. bore.

MESSES J. AND W. TOLLEY'S LIST OF PRICES OF PUNT GUNS.

Bore.	Muzzle-Loaders.	Pin-fire.	Central-fires.	
			Snider.	Arm-strong.
1½ inch.	£28	£35	£38	} £65
1½ inch.	£35	£40	£43 10s.	
1½ inch.	£40	£47	£54	

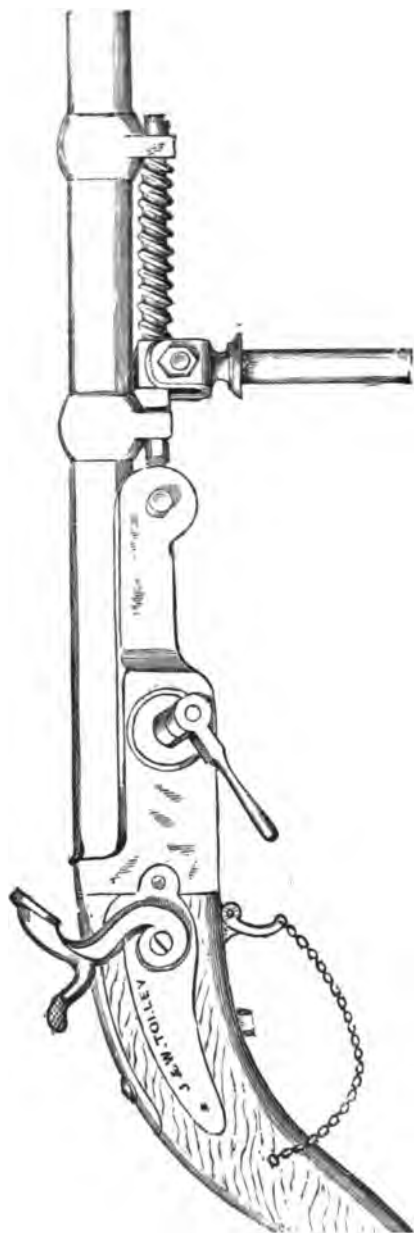
When any of these guns are required to be fitted with a recoil frame, of the pattern shown in next page, an extra charge of 5*l.* per frame is made by the makers.

But I do not advocate these frames. I have devised a far better and less expensive plan, which will be found fully referred to in the chapter which deals with recoil apparatuses.

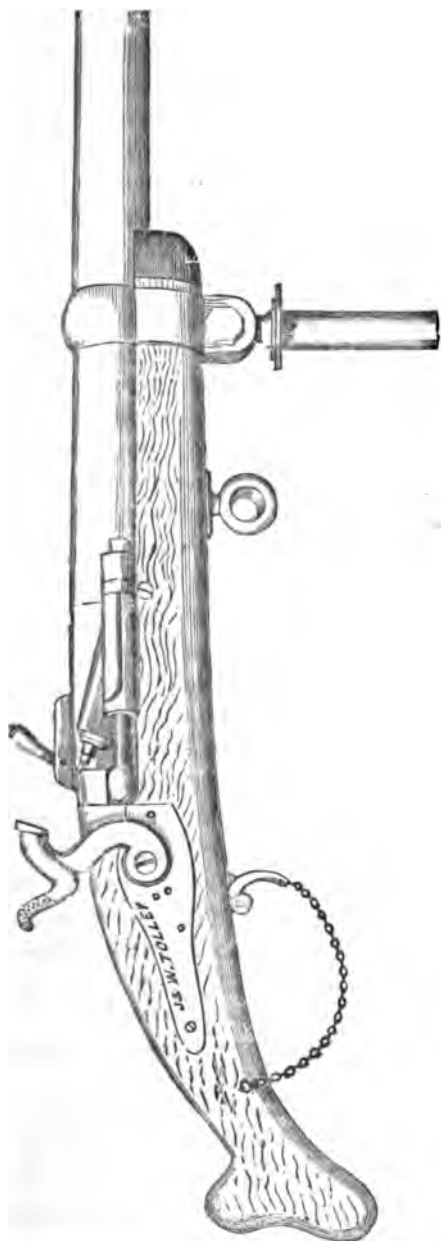
The cut on next page shows a pin-fire punt gun fitted with a spring recoil frame and swivel.

The illustration is so plain that it requires no comment. The-puntsman extracts his empty cases with a hand-extractor, as is usually the case with pin-fire breechloaders. The bent stock (shown in this and in the muzzle-loader cut), when the gun is to be fired, is slipped under the armpit; the left hand is placed on the stock, the shooter's cheek lying on his left hand, so as to take aim, and yet not place his cheek in direct





MESSES. TOLLEY'S PIN-FIRE PUNT GUN WITH RECOIL APPARATUS AND SWIVEL.



SNIDER PUNT GUN, WITH SIMPLE SWIVEL AND BREECHING-RING.

contact with the stock ; and the right hand pulls the trigger-chain. By these means the right arm may press, more or less heavily, on the stock, in conjunction with the left hand, so as to regulate the line of aim of the gun ; and when the recoil takes place the stock glides harmlessly under the armpit, without doing any injury to the gunner.

It will be found that with the style of recoil frame thus illustrated the jar of the recoil is not felt or heard nearly so much as the rebound of the gun which occurs immediately after the recoil, simply because the recoil acts on the spring, and thus works smoothly ; whereas, when the gun has done recoiling, it, suddenly and violently, springs forward, and finds then a sudden check when meeting again the iron swivel head, thus causing a jar which is very noisy, straining, and therefore, in the long run, injurious to the punt. I therefore contend that a recoil frame, to be really efficient and satisfactory, ought to have two springs or buffers (see my own plan hereinafter described) one working fore, and the other one aft of the swivel head, so as to meet both recoil and after-recoil, and a couple of thick india-rubber rings placed on the spring rod against the swivel head, if a steel spring is resorted to, would somewhat efficiently deaden the concussion.

The illustration on page 33 is that of a central-fire punt gun on the Snider principle, fitted with a simple swivel and a breeching ring. Punt guns on this plan are very easily and quickly loaded, fired, or unloaded. The extractor runs along the hinge rod of the action, and, when home, fits into, and forms part of, the chamber that receives the cartridge, the flange of which is laid hold of by a projecting cam on the extractor, and withdrawn quite readily ; the whole block, when open, being the handle with which purchase is obtained to draw it out.

The illustration on page 36 is that of a patent central-fire punt gun in loading position.

A. is the breech, which is bodily screwed in and out of the chamber. B. is the cartridge. In this gun the extraction of the cases is performed by two steel claws. These claws are shown in the "loading" cut, on the top and bottom of the loose breech ; of course they go into the chamber with the

cartridge, and after firing, when withdrawn with the loose breech (of which they form a part), they necessarily pull out the case, of whose rim they have had, throughout, a firm hold.

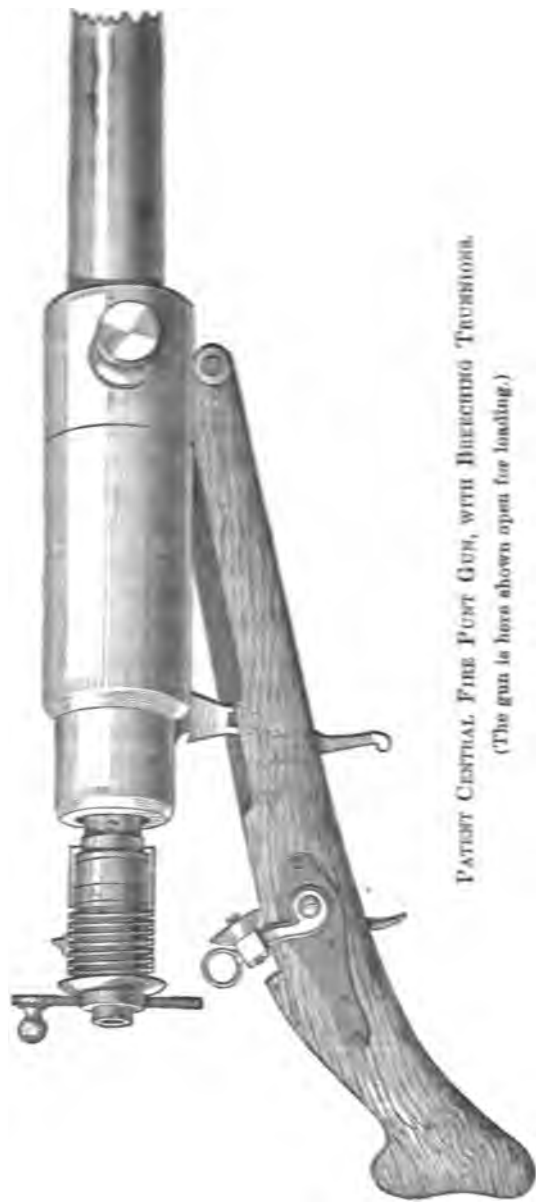
The same gun is shown ready for firing on page 37.

It will be plainly perceived how the gun is worked, I therefore need not enter into any further details respecting it. The breeching trunnions, to my mind, are placed rather forward, but, of course, a good deal depends on the length and weight of the weapon.

I may here state that, when I originally referred to this gun in the *Field*, I had called it the Armstrong, merely for the sake of a distinguishing name for it—as it has none in the trade—when its inventor, Lieut.-Col. Dumaresq, wrote to explain under what circumstances he had devised the plan—which he had made over to Messrs. Osborne, of Whitehall-street, Birmingham—and pointing out that it had no claim to be called an Armstrong. This I readily admitted, the two systems being widely different. But is there any objection to its being called “Armstrong,” for convenience sake? There are so many “patent” guns, that some peculiar denomination for each is necessary, otherwise it would be impossible to know “which was which.” Had I known that Col. Dumaresq was the inventor of the system, I would originally have stated it, as a matter of course.

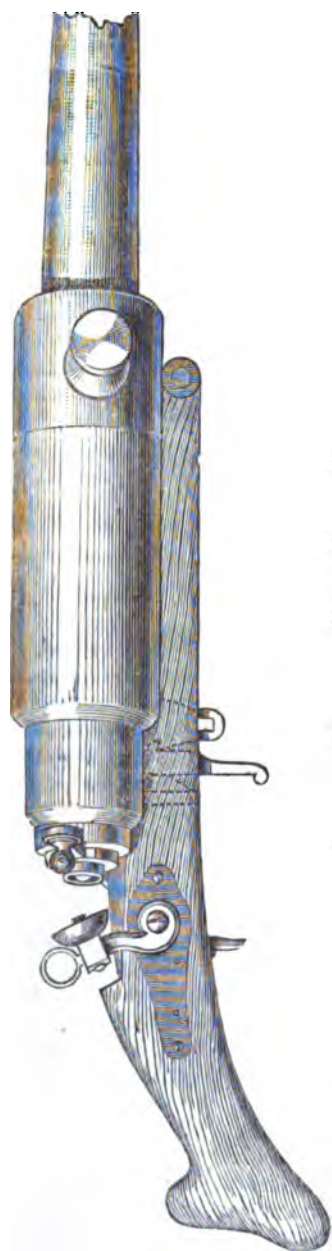
As concerns the three plans of breechloaders of which I have just given illustrations, their systems are those most generally in use; but there are scores of other breechloading punt guns, and of course it would be impossible to illustrate them all. I will, however, in my next chapter, describe one more, whose plan has kindly been sent to me by Capt. Morgan.

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PATENT CENTRAL FIRE PORT GUN, WITH BREACHING TRUNNION.

(The gun is here shown open for loading.)



PATENT CENTRAL FIRE PUNT GUN.  
(Closed, ready for firing.)

## CHAPTER V.

### BREECH-LOADING PUNT GUNS

(Continued).

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THE history of Captain Morgan's gun being most interesting, I give it in its entirety.

Captain Morgan, after some remarks of mine in the *Field*, wrote to the editor :

SIR,—In the *Field* some time back "Wildfowler" expressed a wish that I would give some of my experiences in the pursuit of wildfowl. I have read most, if not all, of his articles on the subject, and I consider that he has dealt well with everything in regard to the matters in question. After a quarter of a century's experience, I can see nothing better than Colonel Hawker's system of punt building ; but we must all admit that he is behindhand in the weapons required to earn a victory over the wary game. A muzzle-loading gun, if properly loaded, and if you can make certain of its going off, will create great destruction in a mass of fowl, as much as a breechloader of the same power. But, as I am my own gunner and gun cleaner, I object to the muzzle-loader. In the first place, its ignition is not certain except with a priming tube ; even then there may be a doubt—a little damp in the breech may cause a missfire, or what is as bad, a hangfire. I once fired at a lot of teal all huddled together on a point of mud (a regular family shot) ; the gun was well laid, I pulled the lanyard, the gun made a sort of a jig, the teal rose, and the shot hit the mud, but I got no teal—they had just time to rise and save their bacon. Then as to cleaning it, sweeping a kitchen chimney is nothing to it. So, altogether let us, gunners of the year 1879, bury the muzzle-loader ; but with a hope that we shall do as much with our breechloaders as our forefathers did in days of yore, which I doubt ; *tempora mutantur*, the fowl are not to be had as in their days.

Now, with regard to the weapon to choose and the principle, I will say a few words. According to my ideas, these are the following principles of breechloading punt guns : viz., the Snider, only applicable to a light gun ; the Lefauchaux principle ; the Armstrong, which I fancy can be

applied to any calibre or weight of metal. The above guns I have noticed have been alluded to by "Wildfowler" in the *Field* of Oct. 19, 1878; but I see one breechloader not spoken of, and this is the one I intend treating of, namely, one on Clayton's principle. In the year 1870 a friend of mine purchased for me at the Museum of Firearms, Peckham Rye, London, a secondhand breechloader on the above principle. On inspecting the gun I found that it had been altered from a muzzle-loader to a breechloader, and cleverly, by Mr. Berry, of Woodbridge. The gun was fired by tubes. The tubes I got with the gun were over lin. in length, and I stupidly pushed them right into the cartridge; the consequence was that after the explosion took place the tube was regularly rivetted in the vent-hole, and most difficult to extract. The next thing I found wrong was this: upon two or three occasions, after firing, the breech flew open from the recoil. The first time it happened I got a good start; but, on inspection, I found the chamber quite clean, which proved that there was no escape of gas backwards. The next trouble I had with the gun was this: having a shot at wiggon, with the punt aground, the recoil spring broke, thereby disabling it for that day. After this chapter of accidents my readers will naturally say, with Cromwell, "From such a gun may the Lord deliver us."

But I will now take all the misfortunes *seriatim*, beginning with the tubes. I wrote to Mr. Patstone, gunmaker, Southampton. Here is a copy of his obliging letter:

"25, High-street, Southampton.

"Sir,—I am sorry I have not been able to answer your letter till now, &c. I inclose one of our tubes, which you might try. They are not intended to penetrate the cartridge case, the flash from them being sufficiently strong to throw fire several inches. I am afraid you have opened the plug too much; but if you will be good enough to try this tube, and let me know the results, &c., and oblige

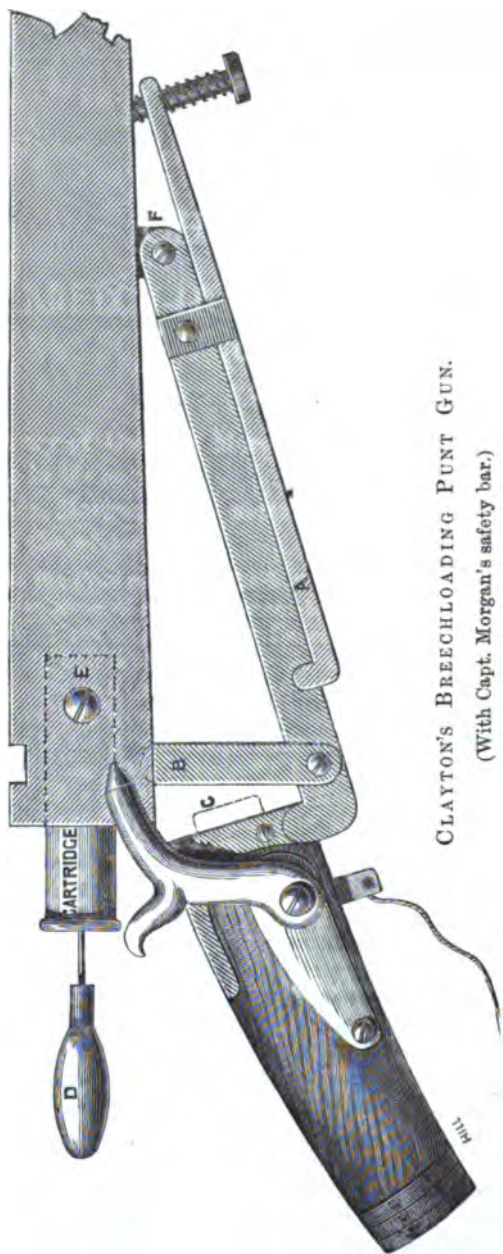
L. PATSTONE (late Clayton)."

I tried the tube sent by Mr. Patstone, and it exploded the cartridge, and did not stick. I ordered a lot more, and never since have had a misfire. So, here ends the tube question.

I will now treat of the breech flying open. The great recoil caused it, but, as I stated before, there was no escape of gas. Being a bit of a blacksmith—a sort of Jack of all trades and master of none—I made an under lever bar attached to the falling bar, to which the breech slide is attached, which passes through the mortice of the gun's breech. This bar projects forward under the barrel; at the end it has a thumbscrew, which, when screwed up, tightens up everything to that extent that there is not a stir. The principle of the gun is admirable, but I have the assurance to state that it was little use without my addition.

Now, as to the recoil spring, it broke from two reasons—first, the punt was sucking the mud; secondly, it was a little too highly tempered; but, as far as they are concerned, steel springs cannot be depended on for a certainty. The spring in question only broke at the end, about one spiral off it. The





# CLAYTON'S BREECHLOADING PUNT GUN.

(With Capt. Morgan's safety bar.)

## GUN OPEN.

- A Safety Bar (Capt. Morgan's addition.)
- B Slide which fills mortice through breech.
- C Plug shot out to back the slide.

- D Extractor.
- E Plug for priming tube.
- F Screw which removes all attachments from barrel.



**CLAYTON'S BRECHLOADING PUNT GUN.**

(With Capt. Morgan's safety bar.)

**GUN CLOSED AND LOADED.**

Length of barrel, 8 feet. Weight, 86 pounds. Charge,  $2\frac{1}{2}$  to 2 $\frac{3}{4}$  ounces of powder.

next day I put it into the forge fire, softened it, and gave it a little stretch, chilled it, then heated it to a blood-red, and dropped it into a pot of oil. I am certain the gunmakers will laugh at me, but I have had many a shot since, and the spring is all right.

I have enlarged on the imperfections of this gun, but, should the Editor think what I have written worth inserting, I shall, for the good of science, enlarge on its perfections, together with some suggestions of my own, accompanied with a small diagram showing the gun as it is, and a few remarks relative to what I consider improvements.

Bunalun, Skibbeen, co. Cork, Ireland.

ANTHONY MORGAN.

Of course, I was most anxious to see the gallant Captain's plan, and through "St. Kames," who had come back from the United States, and whom I had the pleasure of meeting at the *Field* office, I received from Capt. Morgan the accompanying diagrams and description :

You having thought worth publishing in your paper of the 17th last, under head of Wildfowling, my remarks on Clayton's principle of breech-loading punt guns, I am induced to trespass on your kindness again.

[No trespass, Captain, but a most welcome contribution to Wildfowling lore.—"Wildfowler."]

After enlarging on the imperfections of the gun in question, I now intend to write on its perfections. To elucidate better the principle, I send rough but accurate drawings, one of the gun open, with the cartridge partly inserted (see cut, page 40). The other of the gun closed and loaded (see cut, page 41).

The perfections of the gun are : great facility of loading, also of unloading ; inexpensive cartridges, perfect certainty of ignition, and instantaneous facility of cleaning. The elaborate parts of gun, including stock, lock, lever bar, and slide, can be detached from barrel by removing the one screw at F.

So, if the sportsman wishes to leave the barrel after him at an inn or farmhouse on the coast, there can be no fear of its being used. I have two turned plugs of soft wood, one as a muzzle stopper, the other to plug up the breech.

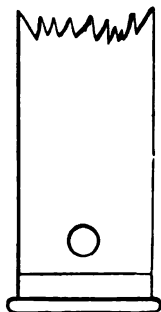
The improvements I would suggest on the gun I possess are these, namely : A much greater weight of metal at the breech. I would have the breech thickened for about eighteen inches to a thickness of half an inch, like the Armstrong gun, as I believe in no gun without weight of metal. There is a sliding bolt to be noticed in drawing of gun closed, on the principle of a common door bolt. This bolt is supposed to shoot up to the slide B, which passes through the breech mortice, and to exercise a pressure on it. I am not satisfied with its results. I would prefer that the wooden stock was made quite straight (instead of bent, as in my drawing), and to have an iron rod with a coarse threaded screw passing through it, having a nut inside something like our old-fashioned bed-post screws ; in fact, any

screw that will give horizontal pressure on slide. As to the cartridges, the bases are solid brass, turned in the lathe. I renew them myself. One of the cases with the drawings will be (I expect) at your office by the end of the week. The cartridge case I send has been repeatedly fired by me and renewed. After a shot the paper part of the cartridge is completely burnt up.

A. J. MORGAN.

Captain Morgan's cartridge cases just alluded to are peculiar, and require a short description :

The body is made of brown paper, the base is of strong brass. Near the rim, a hole is punched into the case (as shown in the accompanying diagram), and over this hole a thin piece of paper is pasted. Now, when the trigger is pulled, the tube sends a flash of fire through this thin paper into the charge, and thus the ignition is perfect and certain.



As to style of shooting, it is, rightly enough, insisted by the lovers of muzzle-loaders that so far, and generally speaking, breechloading punt guns do not shoot so well and so hard as their muzzle congeners ; but, as I have repeatedly pointed out, the fact of the matter is simply this :

The boring of punt guns, as regards breechloaders, is as yet, generally speaking, pretty indifferent, because breechloading punt guns, somehow, are still in their infancy. Choke-boring, however, has now been found so superior to cylinder-boring, in giving both superior pattern and penetration in ordinary shoulder guns, that, eventually, choke-boring will be applied to all big guns as well, if it has not already been done to those which have been issued by the various makers.

When ordinary breechloading shoulder guns were first produced the universal testimony was that the new guns did not come up to the old average muzzle-loaders by a long way. But now what do we see ? Why, nowadays, shoulder guns on the various breechloading plans leave behind the very best muzzle-loaders ever turned out by our old makers, and the same, depend upon it, will hold good ere long with punt guns ; and it stands to reason that it must be so, for, if average breech-

loading shoulder guns are better than average muzzle-loaders of equal gauge, why should not a breechloading punt gun be made to shoot stronger and better than a muzzle-loading gun of equal size ?

Every one, I think, will admit the force of my argument. I do not for a moment deny that the various breechloaders that have been tried may have been inferior to punt gun muzzle-loaders. I have explained the reason why, viz., many of the makers are only now feeling their way in breechloading punt guns ; but what I argue is, that as soon as the traffic in breechloading punt guns will get of sufficient importance, the breechloaders will leave far behind the performance of muzzle-loaders ; and, as a matter of fact, there are already a few such guns now in use which are simply perfection in pattern, driving power, and handiness. Putting aside quickness in loading (which is not absolutely necessary, but occasionally desirable, as I have shown) it is far more pleasant when it is hard-freezing to merely open your breech, shove in a cartridge, and be ready, than to bring out powder, wadding, shot, ramrod, work the crutch or unship the gun, &c., in the midst of a storm of rain, snow, or hail, for instance. In fact, there is no comparison between the comfort of using a breechloading punt gun and the bothers inherent to a muzzle-loader. Let the makers take the hint by, firstly, boring the barrels of breech-loaders with chambers ; and, secondly, choke-boring the barrels fully, to the utmost extent ; and I will warrant that muzzle-loaders will be then " out of it " altogether, quite as much as shoulder muzzle-loaders are out of it for ordinary game shooting.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### BREECH-LOADING PUNT GUNS

(Continued).

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I AM not quite certain, but I fancy I have seen at Messrs. Holland's, of New Bond-street, a central-fire breechloading punt gun, whose system of action was very similar, if not exactly alike, to Clayton's. The gun had no extractor, so that it had to be used exclusively with paper cases, and these were extracted in the usual fashion by means of the hand punt gun cartridge extractor, which is screwed in the holes drilled for the purpose in the brass base of the paper cases. This, at best, however, is but a clumsy expedient. The gun in question, however, was to be fitted with an extractor, which will tend greatly to its ease of manipulation.

The gun was about 10ft. long, and was worked on crutches or rests, with a rope breeching. The Manilla rope itself was manufactured with extreme care, and Messrs. Holland informed me that it was quite a treat to work the gun with it.

Another correspondent, Mr. C. J. Fountaine, whilst my articles on punt guns were being published, wrote as follows :

I see that punt guns are under ordeal as to their different merits. As it may interest some of your readers, I give you a description of one that was built under my instructions by Moore and Grey, gunmakers, of Bond-street. The gun is a central-fire breechloader, with a screw plug, which is perfectly safe. The extractor is a dove-tail in the end of the plug breech, in which fits the butt-end of the cartridge case, which most effectually secures its extraction. The butts of the cartridges are so made that they can be used any number of times ; and with these butts, a quire of good brown paper, a former to roll the cases on, and a paste-pot, the gunner is

independent of the cartridge maker. The ignition is, if anything, more certain than with the ordinary central-fire breechloader, as every part is protected from wet, with all the action inside the stock. This gun is 1½ in. bore, weight 1cwt., charge 17oz. shot, and 3oz. powder. As I know that Moore and Grey built some more guns on the same principle, they may probably have one in their shop, if anybody cares to see it; but the first-class London gunmakers do not care about making big guns. I may mention that this gun has been used practically at wildfowl, and answers all its requirements in every respect.

So far, so good. I, for one, am pleased to find breechloaders making way, but that a good deal of prejudice exists against them, the following, from Mr. T. M. Pike, will tend to show :

The advisability of changing from muzzle-loading to breech-loading is the urgent question, as everyone well knows who has had to swab out and reload a nine-foot barrel on a snowy day, or by night. It is of course only a matter of time.

The question is, what possible disadvantages are there attributable to the breechloader? As regards the comfort of the gunner nothing need be said; the only thing is the killing power. Now, at Poole there exists a hopeless prejudice against the breechloader amongst the local gunners, the only reason for which being, as far as I can make out, that Captain Stokes, of the ill-starred *Mistletoe*—the most scientific as well as one of the best working gunners of the harbour—had a large gun (9ft. barrel) converted by Clayton on a drop breech action, which did not turn out a success. The gun was known to be a capital killer before conversion, and, after that operation, was seen on several occasions to make very poor work. Besides steel, copper cases were used, some of which burst, and others got jammed, and very often the job with the cartridges made him in a worse mess than even the old muzzle-loading process. Worst of all, there was a nasty escape of gas at the breech end whenever the gun was fired; but, as a matter of fact, the poor old captain never got much of a season after he had had the alteration, up to the time of his being run down by the *Alberta*, to give the gun a fair trial. However, enough was seen of its performance to give breechloaders a bad reputation at Poole.

Besides this one, there are two others in the harbour which require a word or two to be said about them. They are on the plan described already—of a solid screw breech, which, with the extractor and lock all in one piece, forms a very neat piece of workmanship. These guns are 1½ in. bore, rather above 100lb. in weight, and shoot from 18oz. to 20oz. of shot. They perform very well, the only drawback to them being in the cartridges; these are made of paper, and fit on to a brass base; the fault they have is of bursting about half way down, the result being that the shot goes out in a solid ball, with only a few shots dropping outside, which practically do little or no good, the result of one's shot being nil, a cripple or two, with perhaps one cut in half. Now this happening

at times is a very serious drawback to the guns, as it seems always to occur at one's best chances; besides, the mass of the shot travels as a bullet for a very considerable distance, and, though the chances are certainly much against its doing any mischief, still one hardly likes firing the guns in any direction, when there is anything within half a mile or so susceptible of damage. Apart from this the guns are perfection; there is no possibility of missfire or escape of gas, the action being practically a muzzle-loading one as far as strength and stolidity go; they carry a large charge of shot, 20oz. to a 100lb. gun, which makes a fine sweep when the shot is properly delivered.

I should like to know whether sportsmen have found this inconvenience of the bursting cases. It is only by experience you find it out—by making some unaccountably bad shots. The makers do not advise metal cases, as the drawbacks are serious, the worst of all being a deterioration in the shooting.

I think a gun of this action, with the cartridges made perfect, would be all a puntman could desire; but I hope a good many different plans will be brought forward, and the practical experience of puntsmen with them given. An ounce of practice is worth a deal of theory in this instance, as anything going wrong with a punt gun at night means, practically speaking, going home.

Mr. Pike mentions the use, by the late Capt. Stokes, of a muzzle-loading punt gun converted into a breechloader, with brass cases. Whoever could have devised resorting to *brass* for such a purpose knew very little of punt gunning. Brass is too soft for such rough work. The explosions burst, bend, and tear away brass cases. They are always a trouble. If metal cases are to be used, nothing but steel should be resorted to, and that of a tolerable thickness too. Otherwise the cases might and would crack. As regards the paper cases which act so badly—*i.e.*, balling their shot—the gunners should be told that there is no object to be attained in making the cases thick, as, no matter how thick, one half of them is almost invariably blown away with the load, and the other half is burst, therefore they cannot be reloaded. This being so, paper cases should be made just thick enough to hold their charges, and no more, when it will be found that the power of propulsion of the powder will readily burst that part of the case which leaves the barrel as soon as it gets out, and thus the shot will act pretty well as usual; whereas, if the paper case is thick it acts as a concentrator—a thing studiously to be avoided, except for very long and very exceptional shots. When steel cases are employed



(it cannot be too often insisted upon), the guns should have chambers just fitting the cases; then the shooting would be all than can be wished. It stands to reason that, as breechloading punt guns are now generally built, there being no chamber in their barrels, and the inside of a steel case, owing to the thickness of the metal, being thus necessarily smaller than that of the barrel, to some extent its shooting is not true, because the wads must fly somewhat freely and loosely out of the barrel, thus allowing escape of gas; whereas the wads from a paper case would fit tighter in the barrel, since the substance of the latter case is thinner than that of its rival, and its wads, therefore, proportionately larger. I would therefore suggest to makers the desirability of invariably boring the barrels with a chamber of *just* the length of the steel cases, whereby I am convinced that the shooting with those cases would be greatly improved. Unless the cases fit the chamber exactly, no gun can possibly do its best.

But it is just because some very badly-bored breechloading punt guns have found their way into the market that so many sportsmen object to them. One wrote:

I shot much last winter in company with an elaborate breechloading punt gun—a splendid and formidable weapon to look at; but I have heard it said “All is not gold that glitters.” So with this pretentious punt gun, it would kill nothing beyond sixty or eighty yards, whereas my muzzle-loader would bring them down in a heap twice the distance, and many a large bag of plover I have killed long after the report of the elongated breechloader had died away; and so disgusted did the owner of the fancy breechloader get when he saw the comparative power of the two guns, that he offered to sell it me for 10*l.*, which I declined. I found that he afterwards got that price for it, and glad to get it out of his sight. Breechloaders have the advantage of rapid loading; but this is not the great desideratum in a punt gun. There is generally plenty of spare time to load after collecting your birds. Give me a gun that will kill game in good style when they are in fair range, not feather a lot and disturb the neighbourhood for nothing.

This is all very well, but would this gentleman “be surprised to hear” that, in all likelihood, not only was the breechloader alluded to badly bored, but most likely it had no chamber? And, of course, under the circumstances, what could be expected? And to compare such a gun with the

performance of a good muzzle-loader which most probably was choked (as was that alluded to by a correspondent at p. 7), is not quite fair to the breechloading systems, or plans. Whether a gun is loaded at the breech or at the muzzle, it has nothing to do with its actual shooting. Bore breech-loading guns properly and the advantages of loading at the breech will then be an inducement to buyers to purchase such guns—only let their performances be good.

But some men have certainly remarkable notions. Mr. Pike thus in the following letter refers to a maker who said that he had had to take out the choke of several breechloaders !

One or two allusions have been made to "choke-bore" punt guns. I think "Wildfowler" intimated once or twice that he had used them in practice. I wish he would give us some particulars on this subject, as a gunmaker with whom I had to deal when getting a breechloading gun built some time ago told me that he had had to take the choke of several guns out, as the system did not answer at all for large guns. However, he is only a single case ; and, as I concluded from "Wildfowler's" letter, that he had made use of them successfully, I thought the general public interested in wild-fowling would be glad of his experience, viz., as to increase of range and penetration. The gunmaker I allude to did not give me any particular reason for not choking my gun, so I do not know of any failing to bring against them.

This idea of the gunmaker's is ridiculous, and Mr. Pike must be well aware of it, since, as will be seen below, he dilates upon the way in which Poole gunners actually choke their muzzle-loaders.

There seems a strong prejudice generally among your correspondents against the breechloading system, as at present carried out with regard to these big guns. But surely it must only be a question of boring. My gun, which is bored on Col. Hawker's plan—i.e., relieved at the breech and muzzle, gives very good results at a target. Targets for this sort of work should be very large to be of much use ; the spread of a pound of shot at even eighty yards will surprise anyone not having made actual trial of it.

Different guns carry very different charges, though of the same weight ; for instance, a breechloading gun I have, of 1½ in., 8ft. barrel, 100lb. weight, carries 20oz. or 22oz. of shot as easily as a muzzle-loading one of 9ft., 1½ in. bore and about the same weight, does 16oz. or 17oz. This alone would make a considerable difference in the pattern. I fancy it is in penetration alone that breechloaders fail, and that comes from their being carelessly bored, a cylinder throughout, or something of that sort. I know that very few of the guns coming down to Poole were much good, as

coming from the makers; they had to be re-bored, and some of the old gunners got wonderfully clever at this sort of work. I have often talked with them on the subject, and they have told me of different guns being much improved, and how much they bored out of them, and the plan they adopted in their operations. Most likely this game is applicable to breech-loaders as well. A trial of these guns would be most interesting. Length of barrel is a moot point amongst gunners. There exists at Poole a notion that long barrels kill best; but it is very evident that over a certain length, extra friction only is obtained by length. The shorter a gun the handier it is to have about with one in the punt. This applies even to breechloaders. The application of choke-boring to these guns should enable the length to be diminished, or kept within reasonable bounds.

I quite agree with Mr. Pike. The whole question of breech-loading *versus* muzzle-loading punt guns lies in the nutshell of boring. I have repeatedly said so, and am pleased to find that he indorses my opinion.

As to my actual experience of choke-bored punt guns, I beg to state that those I have used for punting were not tried at targets. I cannot give any *certain* results, and therefore I would rather wait until I can try them with other guns which are now being bored with a view to suiting punters' requirements, and then give *facts* which would be far more satisfactory than my own individual *opinion*. In gunning matters *actual experiments* are what is required. I certainly opine very strongly that the chokes I have seen and used drove very hard and well, but I would naturally prefer having more reliable *data* to go upon than my individual judgment which, as regards firing at fowl at sea, may have been wrong as to distances, &c. Properly measured distances and proper targets are the only reliable tests.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### LOADING PUNT GUNS.

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**THERE** are four principal kinds of black punt gunpowders, and they are used either separately or mixed. The A.T.P. (army Tower proof) is the smallest-grained quality, and is especially fired in the smaller-bored punt guns.

The T.S. (treble strong), No. 8, is a powder with a coarse grain, made with dogwood charcoal, and is very often mixed with the A.T.P. quality for guns firing 11b. and upwards of shot.

The L.G. (large grain) is still coarser, and, either alone or mixed with A.T.P., is a very powerful powder.

The R.L.G. (rifle large grain) is the largest-grained gunpowder used for sporting purposes. Together with the L.G., it is also employed for field artillery. For very large punt or stanchion guns both are excellent powders. They are, in size of grain, just like the powders formerly used, and so highly recommended by Capt. Latour and Col. Hawker.

Messrs. Pigou, Wilks, and Laurence inform me that the two sorts of powders mostly sold by them for punting purposes are the A.T.P. and L.G. qualities.

The name of the R.L.G. powder is rather senseless, as it is never used for rifles, but for rifled artillery. However, such is the name given to it for Government and trade purposes.

In Messrs. Pigou and Co.'s price list of military powders

R.L.G. is called "Rifle Artillery," and L.G. "Ordnance Cannon;" and the wholesale prices are: R.L.G., 80s.; L.G., 70s.; A.T.P., 90s. per 100lb.

By the way, I have some time ago tried the Schultze powder in a punt gun, mixing some Schultze in the proportion of one-third with coarse punt powder, and getting on remarkably well with the mixture, as it appeared to me to drive with extraordinary power.

The shot used for punting depends a great deal on the fancy of the shooter. Generally speaking, the various B, BB, BBB, &c., sizes, are mostly resorted to; but occasionally smaller-sized shot for near range is used; and very large shot when the birds are very wild, is now and then fired. But the results are then somewhat problematical, the pattern being necessarily very open. In a dense, far-off flock, however, great execution is occasionally thus done.

The wadding, generally, is done with tow or oakum; but if the shooter is hard pressed for material, anything sufficiently resisting and elastic will do. I have known a waistcoat of mine doing duty for wadding, once, with perfectly satisfactory results; but the shots were somewhat expensive.

As regards the shot for muzzle-loading punt guns, the loads are ready prepared in cartridges, and rammed home over the powder wad in the usual way. The colonel recommends tying oakum to the top of the shot cartridges, so as to give a good hold to the worm of the ramrod, in case one would wish to unload or change the shot; and this dodge, to this very day, is still practised, and is likely to last as long as muzzle-loading punt guns shall be in use.

As for the powder, I have already given several capital dodges for getting it true home, when dealing with muzzle-loading punt guns. (See Chap. II.)

One of the most frequent sources of discussion amongst punters is the thickness of the wadding to be used, and perhaps a word on the point may not be inappropriate. Now, I have found that a breech-loading gun of 1½ in. bore gave fair results with a 1½ in. thick wad, but shot better still with a 1½ in. wad; a gun of 1½ in. bore, with a 1½ in. thick wad, was

pretty right ; but a gun of 1½ in. bore shot only well with 1½ in., and better with 1¼ in. wadding, and got right with a 1¼ in. wad. *Ergo*, from what I have seen, I have come to the conclusion that the best all-round size to be used would be 1½ in., and it should be the lowest size in all cases.

The wadding, of whatever material it may be (oakum is generally preferred), ought to be of a tough, yet elastic, material. The stuff of which ordinary gun wads are made is no good. The best plan is to submit a thick layer of oakum to some not too considerable pressure—say with some press, and cut out of the oakum sheet thus produced, with a wad punch, as many wads as possible. Such wads would be found quite the thing, as they would be perfectly flat, resisting, and elastic, thus combining all the qualities of a perfect wad. Formerly, in muzzle-loaders a handful of oakum was shoved into the barrel and rammed anyhow, whereby the best shooting could not possibly be obtained. Ordinary wadding, moreover, was not easily removed (if such a thing became desirable) because the wads, being so large and soft, gave way under the pull of the ramrod worm, and thus came out piecemeal ; whereas oakum (as has been repeatedly pointed out), if once the worm is got in, comes out bodily, which is certainly a great advantage ; but really the danger of drawing a powder wad out of a big gun is so great, should an accident occur, that I would, in all cases, advise the gun being fired off, instead, after the shot had been removed. I always did so myself, and would not care to poke about a few ounces of powder at the bottom of a gun barrel, whose muzzle is within half a foot of my nose, with a steel worm which might cause an explosion. For the same reason, I have never taken ashore a loaded punt gun. Some men are very careless in that respect, and the way some of them haul up their punts on the “hards,” rattling away their guns on their benches until they shake again, and all the while loaded and with the caps on, or tubes in, is a “caution.” Many accidents have thus occurred, but really far less than one might be led to expect by such utter recklessness and absolute folly. Of course, to poor men, I know that a load of powder is some consideration ; but, surely, if they

do not wish to fire off their guns (and, as I have pointed out, it is not prudent to try to draw the loads out), they might, at any rate, remove the caps from the nipples, for instance, and substitute for it a piece of leather or some oakum, on which to put the hammer down. This will prevent any accidents from occurring, and, withal, by preventing the access of damp air or water to the inside of the nipple will preserve the priming and load in good state, although, as a matter of precaution, it will be as well to put in a fresh priming when the gun will be needed for use, since the original priming might have been spoilt by some moisture from the oakum itself, for instance.

The ammunition box of a breech-loading punt-gun of the period requires a special description at my hands.

The box itself is flat-shaped, looking much like a pistol case, neatly turned out, and is withal very substantial, so as to stand a good deal of rough usage and wear-and-tear. The case is covered with japanned canvas, and is fitted with a lock and a handle, so as to make it handy for travelling. On opening it, one finds the box divided into some ten or a dozen compartments, containing :—the steel cartridge cases, the brass loaders, a cleaning and loading rod, a sponging piston, a pricker for the nipples, a wad cutter, wads, caps, &c.

The steel cartridge cases are now so substantially made as to last, practically, for ever. Generally six of these cases are sent out with each gun by the makers, and six "loaders" accompany them. I must describe these "loaders." They are made of brass, and are constructed exactly like ladies' double scent bottles, one end containing an exact load of powder, and the other compartment the exact load of shot. The tops are screwed on ; and the tops over the powder being perfectly round, whereas those over shot are filed flat, no mistake can occur when loading the cases, even in the dark, since by feeling one can tell which compartment is intended for the explosive or for the projectiles ; and when the loaders are ready filled one knows, even in the darkest night, by merely the shape of the top, which end to open first for the powder, although, unless the weather be terribly cold, one can pretty well tell at all times, by the difference in the respective weight

of the compartments, which to open first ; still, sometimes it will happen that one's hands are so benumbed by the frost that one cannot tell, by sheer hand-weighing, what is to be done, hence the satisfactory plan of having different tops to each end of the loaders. These loaders have, moreover, engraved respectively at top and bottom the words " powder, so many ounces," and " shot, so many ounces," or " pounds," as the case may be, for day work or new hands. They are made externally rather smaller than the steel cases are internally, and thus they can readily be packed one in each cartridge case, thereby saving a great deal of room. Well, then, six of the compartments of the ammunition box are occupied by the six steel cases, into which are placed the six loaders, ready filled with the proper loads, and in the rest of the compartments the usual paraphernalia for loading and cleaning is to be found.

In the case of pin-fire cases a re-capping apparatus is needed, but for central-fires no such apparatus is required, as the cases are built with their nipples (which are exactly like those of ordinary muzzle-loading guns), screwed in the middle of the base, in a recess of a depth just sufficient to prevent the caps, when on the nipples, from being accidentally exploded when moving the cartridges about. Should, however, a sportsman prefer to use paper cases he can have them made, or make them himself, of any size and of any length, as punt-guns have generally no chambers. Thus some men have cartridges of full length and others with only moderate loads, although they all may use guns of the same bore, weight, and length.

Paper cases, however, can only be used once in a punt-gun, as almost invariably half the case, if not more, is fired away with the charge at every shot, besides which, the rim is invariably burst, unless very substantial, and the body split. There is, therefore, no need to provide a recapping machine if the shooter relies only on ordinary paper cases for his punt-gun. I, for one, do not see many advantages in using paper cases. If they get wet at all, as far as my experience goes (but several sportsmen have devised plans to remedy their



defects), they are apt to bulge and stick in the breech, and then, if one is using an Armstrong or a Snider gun, the extractor is so powerfully irresistible that should the main body of the case have got quite stuck in the barrel the rim will be anyhow extracted, and probably torn off, and then the sportsman has the unpleasant job of having to clear the gun breech of the rest of the cartridge. Now this cannot possibly occur with steel cases. They are bodily so stout that, provided the extractor is in good working order, out the cartridge must come, *nolens volens*, in spite of any amount of sticking. Moreover, steel cases, unless allowed to get exceedingly rusty, and the gun barrel is never cleaned and oiled, rarely do stick. I have never experienced any difficulty in that respect with them, whereas paper cartridge cases have now and then brought out a serious explosion of expletives, in the punt, on my part.

Some men argue that by having paper cartridge cases they can have several varieties of loads ready for use; but so they can with their six steel cases, besides which, look at the bother of carrying a large number of such large paper cases, even when empty. Why, only one hundred of such cases will fill an immensely large box, whereas six steel cases can be put in one's pockets, if necessary, and they will do all that thousands of paper cases could do. Then why have paper cases at all? (that is, provided guns are built to shoot as well with steel as with paper cases, of course, and I have shown that there is no insuperable difficulty there.) And this will apply especially to the man who goes wildfowling in out-of-the-way, unreachable places, or abroad; in fact, anywhere where a supply of paper cases cannot readily be obtained. The cargo of them that he is obliged to take with him takes up all the room in the country cart, or in the yacht he uses, and when he has fired the lot he is done for, and must needs wait till it pleases his makers to forward him a new batch—that is if they have any in stock, or he can make some himself, as Captain Morgan, for instance, invariably does.

Against all these disagreeable features pertaining to the use of ordinary paper cases must be placed, however, the fact that

they shoot better than the steel cases. Of course my experience may have been different from that of other sportsmen, but from my own practice I have found that the actual shooting of several breechloading punt guns has varied with the cartridge cases that were used, *i.e.*, metal or paper cases; and I am certain that other shooters have found it to be the case with their own guns.

To what extent this difference in the shooting of both cases is carried could easily be decisively ascertained by a series of actual experiments with many punt guns; but that it exists there is not the slightest diffidence in my mind, as far as my own guns have been concerned; and therefore, as a precautionary measure, which can do no harm and a deal of good, I have repeatedly suggested to makers of punt guns the desirability of invariably boring the barrels with a chamber of just the length of the steel cases, whereby I am convinced that the shooting with those cases would be very greatly improved.

Respecting paper cases: some short time ago a puntsman inquired where he could get them made for his punt gun. Many other amateurs may be in the same predicament, for, very few firms undertake that sort of work. However, Messrs. Rigby, of St. James's-street, and Messrs. Holland, of New Bond-street, make these cases to order, of any dimensions, and charge, I believe, 50s. per hundred, which is not an exorbitant price by any means.

As to laying down absolute rules for loading punt guns, it is a matter of impossibility. Each gun has its individuality, so to speak. Its metal, its length, its bore, its weight, have to be considered; and, unless she is studied carefully and repeatedly tried, it is impossible to get her to do her best. I have seen two guns of exactly the same length and bore taking two very different loads to produce the same results. *Ergo*, in my opinion the minimum and maximum loads of a gun should be decided upon, and all intervening loads should be tried, so as to come to what suits her best. This is the only way of arriving at a correct solution for punt guns, whose various idiosyncracies are so pronounced, that virtually each gun is a new problem to be solved, not only in its loads, but in its

style of propelling shot. That is why professionals who have always used the same guns are, as a rule, so handy with them. They know their "form" to a T, hence eminently favourable results are attained, when probably a stranger would vote the gun on trial a fearful "beast." I have known many such cases. Even the rigging of a gun affects its "form." A gun fired direct from a swivel will take less ammunition than if she is fired from a rope-breeching, and the reason for this is obvious. In the first case the gun, not giving way at all, fires "hard." In the other, extra power in the "driving" must compensate for the recoil, and so on. I have never yet seen a gun that could not be made to kill, if sufficient trouble were taken to ascertain what suited her best; but some men are very impatient. They fire two or three shots—funking the job all the time—kill nothing, and swear that the gun is worthless. I knew a fellow with a really fair breechloading punt gun who sold her for a trifle, because he could not kill with her. I saw his loads—they were just about half what they should have been! Well, he bought, then, a notoriously good muzzle-loader, and again failed—for the same reason. The fact is, he was afraid to load properly; but it should be remembered that a punt gun never shoots well unless with a full load, hence the amateur's failure.

In conclusion it is absolutely impossible to foretell, by her weight, what *exact* loads will suit a punt gun; one can only *approximatively* determine upon what loads to try, and it is only when this has been done that any decision can be come to. Thus the table of loads, which I have given, should be taken but as guides, and the individuality—so to speak—of each gun should be studied.

As an instance of this fickleness of punt guns a correspondent wrote:

I was trying two the other day, as nearly alike as possible in weight, length, and bore, yet one shot 12oz. easier than the other did 10oz. Again, a friend of mine has a little gun, the barrel of which only weighs 35lb., bore 1½in., and he fires ¾lb. and 2oz. of powder with comfort; whereas in the *Field* some time ago, I saw that the gun Messrs. Tolley build to carry ¾lb. weighs 65lb.

This, then, shows, in rather an *outré* manner, that unless one

tries sundry loads, one has but little chance of hitting upon what suits any given gun.

The patterns given by punt guns vary very considerably with their bores and their loads; but I should certainly consider that a pattern of 80 with 11b. of No. 1 shot in a target 2ft. 4in. by 2ft. 2in., set up at ninety yards, would be very fair work indeed; but I have never systematically tried punt guns at targets. Messrs. Pigou, Wilks, and Laurence have kindly offered me the use of their instruments and range at Dartford; and possibly I may, some day, avail myself of their very obliging offer.

Meanwhile "*Skolopax*" gives the following information:—

I was very anxious to know what kind of pattern could be made at ninety yards with 2lb. of shot, and for this purpose I obtained eight sheets of sheet-iron, each 2ft. by 6ft., and constructed a temporary fixture on a smooth part of a sandy shore. The sheets were then attached to it by T-headed nails, driven into the timber through the joints, thus saving the trouble of drilling holes. The target's dimensions were 12ft. high vertically and 8ft. broad. It was then whitewashed, and a black spot painted 2½ft. from the lower edge and 4ft. from the sides. The canoe was drawn down on her carriage, provided with rollers, on which the canoe rested, and placed ninety yards as a medium distance from the target. The gun was laid and secured with her breechings in the ordinary way, and directed at the black spot; it was fired by a lanyard made fast to the trigger, and the recoil drove the canoe clean off the carriage—and a very heavy canoe it is—showing the immense power of these guns, which can only be ascertained by similar experiments. The pattern on the target was beautiful. Some shots in patches went clean through the sheet iron more than  $\frac{1}{8}$  in. thick; the greater part, recoiled from the target, were reduced to atoms, and some flattened as if they had been hammered on an anvil; and the sand in front was ploughed up for eight or ten yards, where the lower circle of the shower of shot began to take effect. Wishing to ascertain the penetration of BB at that distance into wood, I placed a board 5ft. long, 9in. broad, and  $\frac{3}{4}$ in. thick, of white deal, along the bottom of the target under the black spot, and we found it shot into fragments, which have been preserved as a proof of the enormous power of these guns. The charge was the usual one then used with the gun, 2lb. BB and 5½oz. of powder well stowed.

This is very interesting.

Broadly speaking, according to my experience, with a powerful punt gun, loaded with mould shot, anything that is fairly hit within 120 yards is certainly disabled or killed.

I quite agree that the most usual ranges are under 100 yards; but, just as the usual range for ordinary small-bore shoulder guns is under forty yards, and yet game is killed beyond, so with punt guns the range is occasionally extended when required, with more or less success.

Respecting my advocacy of choke-bores, it was objected by a writer, S. S. G. :

I don't doubt that where "Wildfowler" punts they answer every purpose; but he takes rather too general a view.

A gun that suits one district does not sometimes suit another. In some wild, open places wire cartridges are universally used; but on waters where the punter can dodge about round mud banks, long grass, and invariably gets well up to fowl, and frequently comes upon them unawares, then loose charges are used, and a cylinder would be better than a full choke. I have punted under both circumstances, and found that what you can't do without in one place you can't do with in another.

This objection is, in my opinion, untenable. S. S. G. thinks that choke-bore guns would carry too close. Well, now, I find the fowl getting wonderfully wild, and they are wilder every season. This being so, far-killing guns are desirable. This is for day work.

For night work, my average range I fancy to be from 45 to 60 yards—that is, the outside birds nearest to me are at that range from the gun; in which case, were the gun loaded as for day work, when the range is from 80 to 120 yards, and tipped high, I should certainly make a poor score. But nothing prevents the gunner from loading his choke-bore so as to scatter its shot well for night shooting and short range. I would not think myself of firing the same loads for both day and night work, and no one would. And what I contend is this, with a choke-bore and two sets of cartridges you get extreme range and tremendous penetration, and also short range, and scatter, according as occasion requires; whereas, with a smooth-bore, you never can have very long shots—whatever you may do with short ones. *Ergo*, the breech-loading choke-bore punt gun has the pull over his cylinder *confrères*, just as the choke-bore field gun has it over the ordinary bored shoulder gun whenever long range is in question.

It should always be borne in mind that choke-bores are not necessarily only long-range guns. By a proper arrangement of the wads in loading, and an alteration in the respective quantities of powder and shot used, very different results are obtained, which accordingly can be made subservient to any end in view on the part of the shooter.

I trust this explanation will be satisfactory, and bring S. S. G. round to my way of thinking. I like to convince by fair argument, and mine in the present case, I troth, is incontrovertible.

It should, however, be remembered that for a punt gun penetration is a *sine quâ non*. Therefore, when causing the gun to scatter, the shooter must bear in mind that the propelling power is *not* to be decreased in any way, whatever else he may do. Therefore, the plans to be adopted are: first, putting a double wad over the shot, and a single one over the powder, and not alter the usual doses of powder and shot; secondly, if for very short range, a single wad should be placed over the powder, which should be as usual in quantity, the shot should be reduced, and two wads should be put over it, when the puntsman will find a scatter which would please the most inveterate of blunderbuss lovers, and a penetration which will, as regards those fowl which are at all hit in any vital part, send them without delay to their "happy feeding grounds."

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### AIMING AND FIRING PUNT GUNS.

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IF the puntsman has to fire a light load, he may strike with his little finger (*i.e.*, the whole hand being in front of the trigger, so that the little finger has to do the business); but if you load heavily, the gun, when fired, jumps and shakes and rings so brutally (if I may so express myself), that it is a dangerous affair to place one's fingers in too close proximity to it. I have had all my right-hand finger nails broken once, and my hand half-benumbed for a while as well, by a kicking punt gun; and I am not likely to forget it in a hurry. Therefore, to avoid any such danger, I would advise a trigger-string to be in all cases used. In some guns, a thin brass chain is fixed to the trigger (as shown in illustrations of punt guns, see pages 20, 32, and 33), but some men have the trigger string made of string, and others of leather—it is a pure matter of taste. One end is tied securely to the trigger, and the other end terminates in a loop. Put your finger through that loop, coil the string round your hand, and you will be all right. Never trust to pulling with finger and thumb, because the weather is sometimes so cold that your fingers are benumbed and cannot act on the, generally, pretty hard trigger, whereas the strength of one's fist can always be exerted.

If the puntsman wishes to place his shoulder against the stock, he must observe two rules: (1) he must pad the stock heavily; and (2) there must not be anything in his way likely

to stop him abruptly when the recoil forces his body backwards on the floor of his punt. The said flooring, accordingly, must be perfectly smooth.

Respecting my remarks and hints on "shouldering," a correspondent wrote me some time ago that, in his part of the world, nobody shouldered a punt gun. On due inquiry, I found that my correspondent, and his neighbouring sportsmen of the punt gun, invariably fired over 1lb. of shot, sometimes as much as 2lb.; and he is actually now building a punt gun to carry 2½lb. of shot. Now, it stands to reason that such loads must correspondingly produce a tremendous recoil, spite of the best breeching; and, I for one, would not care then to shoulder a weapon so heavily loaded, nor do I believe that it would be perfectly safe to do so, even with the best of padding and recoil breeching. Still, if, as my much-esteemed correspondent pointed out, no one shoulders a punt gun in his district (and I have shown why *they* don't), that does not prove *per se* that everybody else abstains from doing so. As a matter of fact, very many puntsmen do shoulder their guns. Whenever the loads are not too heavy, and the gun stock is carved in the shape shown at pages 33, 36, and 37, or else flat, a large and well-padded boss is added to it by the men, and the kicking is then hardly felt, that is, if the breeching rope is right and taut, of course.

I argue that if you use your gun in a very light-built punt with a breeching rope, the weight of your body, when you put your shoulder to the gun, saves your punt from straining. But it is out of the question to shoulder a punt gun for any other reason; and if your punt is stout, and well able to stand the work, it is a great comfort, and also a great help when aiming, to have only the birds and the "tip" to attend to.

Respecting the precautions to be taken with punting artillery, it should always be remembered that punt guns, even when not loaded with shot, are not to be trifled with; indeed, no guns whatsoever should be, as accidents will occur with any gun, even if blank cartridges are fired. But what I want to point out is, that the power of even wadding alone,



when propelled by such a load of powder as will suit a punt gun, is quite as dangerous as if the projectiles were actually in the barrel, because the oakum wadding forms a solid ball, which will travel considerably over a hundred yards with irresistible power. Now, this should be made known to tyros, who perhaps would not think of it, or believe it possible. It is, nevertheless, a fact that the wad of a punt gun would kill a man, even if he were over a hundred yards off. Instances to corroborate this irresistible driving power of the wad are simply numberless, and no doubt many of my wildfowl-shooting readers will remember cases bearing out the truth of my assertion. I will, however, from my own experience, state that I have seen a swan into whose body an oakum wad had been driven so hard that it had made its way nearly through, at a range of some hundred yards. I have three or four times myself found birds with their heads cut off, and otherwise so mutilated that nothing but the wadding could have done the deed. I once at low tide fired at some birds flying along a mud bank, killed three, and prodded an oar up to the blade nearly, in the ooze, in the hole made therein by the wadding ball. *Ergo*, if you should fire off a punt gun, even blank, don't fire it in any direction where someone might be. Indeed, I remember reading, in Mr. E. T. Booth's catalogue of the cases in his Dyke-road Museum at Brighton, an instance bearing on the subject. I forget now what birds Mr. Booth was in pursuit of, at the time; but when he went to pick up what he had shot, he found that the wadding had cut off the head of one of his birds (and the best of course, as usual). Now, even should the gun be fired off in the air, it will be well that no one stands near the muzzle, for the roar is simply deafening, and one's ears will ring for a week after such an explosion if in close proximity to the muzzle. I know a man who has been deaf of one ear ever since such a gun was fired near his head for a joke. And again, firing off such a gun very near houses will certainly damage the windows. I have never myself seen such a thing done, but Mr. Booth describes such an incident in the book above alluded to, and it is so richly related, and withal so comical, that I cannot resist the

temptation, and must give the narrative in its entirety. It will thus illustrate my meaning so forcibly, that whoever reads it will henceforth beware.

I was stopping at a first-rate hotel (says Mr. Booth), in the north of Scotland, and this hotel, as is commonly the case in the Highlands, was situated in a remarkably wild and, during winter, deserted region. Having finished a capital dinner, and being tired of my own company, I strolled into the kitchen to see what was going on. Here I found the punt gun propped up on a couple of chairs in front of a roaring peat fire, with two or three keepers sitting smoking beside it. As I noticed that several sparks from a lump of peat, with which one of the men was lighting his pipe, fell over the lock, I inquired if the charge had yet been drawn.

"Yes," remarked John, the puntsman, with the air of one who thoroughly understands his business, and has properly performed it; "she's washed out, loaded, and carefully primed, ready for the morning!"

On inspecting the lock, I discovered that the covering to the nipple was simply a piece of brown paper, such as Highlanders use for tinder, and, consequently, extremely liable to ignite from a spark; so I suggested that the gun should be placed in the far corner of the room, where it would still be protected from the frost. (Some gunners have an idea that it is dangerous to allow the frost to get into the barrel of a punt gun.)

Nothing, however, would satisfy the landlady, who came in at this point, but the immediate removal of the dangerous weapon. I accordingly ordered the men to take the gun out and draw the charge.

In less than two minutes there was a deafening explosion, followed by a fearful crash—the glass was blown in, the lights blown out, the landlady fainted, the lassies screamed, and the dogs barked. On rushing out to see what had happened, I learned that, after cleaning out and loading the gun, the men had carried the rods down to the punts, when they had gone to see that all was snug for the night, and, consequently, they had no means at hand for drawing the charge; so, placing a cap on the nipple, they had steadied the butt on the bricks of the yard, and, holding the muzzle in the air, had fired the charge, with the result described. On subsequent inquiry, I found that John, who had rather a spite against the landlady (as the stern matron had reprimanded him for some unbecoming levity she had detected between him and one of the damsels of her establishment), had done it in hopes of giving her a fright, without having bestowed a thought on the panes of glass that would be blown in by the concussion, and which, naturally, fell to my share to pay for.

After this illustration, people who will fire punt guns near houses should stand the consequences.

Coming to the mention made by Mr. Booth, in above note, that some men do not like the frost to get into the barrels of their punt guns, I have known many men who had the

same objection. Of course, just as heat dilates the metal, so will frost contract it. Are not iron rails so plainly affected thus, that play has to be allowed them when they are set on the lines? *Ergo*, gun barrels are also liable to be strongly affected by the weather, and, without going the length of saying that it is dangerous (*i.e.*, for fear of a bursting) to allow a gun to stand by in a hard frost, I certainly think it is much better to have it indoors on hard nights. If it does no good, it certainly does no harm, and there might be some good ground for the professionals' fears on that subject. If, as we are told, intense cold affects the texture of metal in rails, iron bridges, &c., it may and does also affect the direction of the fibres in the metal of gun barrels, to what dangerous extent, however, remains to be seen. The precaution, anyhow, is not a bad one, although when in use the guns are now and then subjected to intense cold. It cannot be helped then, however, and that makes all the difference.

Respecting punt guns bursting, this, with the style of decked punts now in general use, very rarely occurs. In olden times, when swivel guns were simply rigged on the stem piece, which acted as a knee, it frequently happened that, in the dark, the muzzle of the gun, as it protruded for some feet beyond the bows, was poked into the mud banks along the creeks, and, of course, if severely choked in that fashion, a burster would be the result. Now there is not one punt in a thousand which will allow the muzzle of the gun to protrude beyond its bows, and that is a very sensible plan.

Doubtless, some people may wonder how it was that puntsmen could thus allow their guns to be choked, arguing that for their own sakes they should have proceeded carefully.

Well, I dare say they did—as far as they could; but really it is impossible, at night especially, to avoid things of that sort, unless everything is carefully put inboard. How often has it occurred to me when “doing” some creeks in a dinghy, when the shoulder guns were resting “slantingdicularly” in the boat, stocks on the floor against a “rib,” and the muzzles resting on the gun’ale, so as to be handy—how often has it occurred that in the excitement of a cripple chase, I got all

the barrels more or less besmeared and, now and then, choked with mud, when going up and down narrow creeks, at low tide, in the dusk of early morning, or late evening.

You can't quite prevent that sort of thing, but I invariably when in doubt feel with my fingers if the muzzles are clear. Now, this can readily be done with shoulder guns, however heavy; but with swivel guns, in the small, shelly punts of olden times it was more than could be readily managed—hence the accidents that sometimes then occurred.

With the style now resorted to, a punt gun cannot get choked with mud. If it should burst, the loading must be answerable for it. Sometimes the men fire very many times their muzzle-loaders, the barrels get quite crusted inside; finally, when loading it, the wadding sticks, and will not go down. Without a thought, the gun is fired off—to clear it (professionals imagine that punt guns can stand anything), and the gun thereby probably gets strained.

Or else, in a gun fit to carry only 12oz. of shot, if the weather and flocks are tempting, the men will cram 1lb. or 1½lb., or more, of shot and risk it. Perhaps the gun does not burst; but such heavy firing must strain it wofully in the long run, and if a burster should occur, no wonder, I think.

Now, no such thing can happen with breechloaders, which are, in every way, vastly superior to muzzle-loaders, if otherwise turned out good shooting guns—*cela va sans dire*.

Another thing to be guarded against with punt guns is a hang-fire. If the gun does not go off, do not bring your proboscis near the hammer, to see what is up; for if so, and the gun, after due deliberation, discharges its contents, you will probably, after it, require an artificial and complete set of teeth. The causes of hang-fire are well known, and they will particularly happen with muzzle-loading guns that are exposed to bad weather for a long stretch, now and then, unless the special precautions, referred to elsewhere, have been taken.

But, putting aside the danger of getting one's face, for a second or two at any rate, close to a gun which is supposed to have missed fire, it will be well for the gunner to keep the gun on its line of aim until sure that it will not go off; for, if

it should go off, though the fowl may be well on the wing, and have some way on, the shot might yet knock over not a few. This has happened to me, and I have seen it happen to many others; and Mr. Booth, in his most interesting volume, narrates how once a lot of fresh birds flew into the shot of his gun which had been thus hanging fire. I like to mention all these things, because they are of paramount importance to beginners; and the science of wildfowl shooting consists not only in artistically getting near the birds, but in avoiding all these mishaps which may occur in the sport, and making the best of every circumstance connected with it—all these constitute successful wildfowl shooting, whether it be ashore or afloat.

There is one point on which I wish to dilate, as it is of great importance, and it is on the proper aiming of "set" punt guns. In reply to a correspondent, I said he was quite right in aiming at the feet of fowl on smooth water with most guns, as otherwise his shots would fly over them. This, it should be borne in mind, is applicable only when the fowl are few, not far off, and not particularly wild, in which case the shot will just knock them over; but when many fowl are together, a fair distance off, and likely to rise *en masse*, the aim should be above them, with most guns, so as to clip a lane in the rising mass, when just off the water, and I have already stated as much; but, on smooth water, and when the fowl are not likely to have time to rise at the flash, a true gun should be aimed at their feet. For instance, it frequently occurs that two or three cripples swim away together at a range which defies the shoulder guns, and when the punt runs aground, it is, in many such cases, advisable to polish off the crippled group with the big gun so as to avoid losing the birds altogether. Now as in this case the birds cannot rise at the flash, firing at an elevation, as if for an usual shot, would be a waste of ammunition, because the shot would fly over their heads, and probably not touch a feather; whereas aiming under the nearest bird will most probably knock over the lot at one single shot, if they are near enough to each other.

To resume then: For ducks or teal, in shallows, or on the mud, the gun should be set high, because they jump up at the

flash, and therefore will just meet the shot. For pochards the gun should be laid so as to fire point blank into the first ranks, by which means, when they will skim on the water to evade the punt gun, the load will just cut a lane into them. For geese, the punt should be, at the last moment, swung round so that the gun will point to windward of the birds, when, on their rising and facing the wind, they will give a good cross shot.

In rough water, never fire at sitting birds, because your shot will be wasted into the waves—always put them up and simultaneously pull the trigger string, or strike the trigger.

In smooth water, when small trips are about and not wild, the gun should be fired dead at their feet, if within ninety yards.

When dealing with large flocks, however, it is always best to put them up at all times, and then strike—firing high—more or less, according to the nature of the fowl and the range, when up to enormous distances the fowl may be killed.

There are, however, some guns which act exceeding queerly, and their peculiarities must be studied. Thus, some send their shot high, and others low. With the latter you must aim above the birds; with the former a great deal below their feet, and so on. In short, unless a man has used his punt gun a good deal, he hardly knows what it can or can't do. It is quite amusing to see how well-known good guns, falling into the hands of muffs, get run down, and *vice versa*—hitherto thought indifferent ones being praised.

“Skolopax” gave the following description of his experience and mode of using his punt gun :

First it should be mentioned that we found all kinds of springs to ease the recoil troublesome and useless, and so gave them up. The gun, being placed on its crutch, is placed so top or muzzle heavy as to require two or three pounds on the butt to bring it to a balance. A strap with a buckle attached to the cranked bar on the bottom of the canoe is passed over the butt, and keeps it in any position, with the muzzle higher or lower, found to be most convenient. This strap will be found most valuable at all times, especially when working up to birds, as it will act as a third hand when the other two are engaged with the yoke lines. Well, we will suppose he has come within 100 yards of them, and is going to take his shot. Here it

may be mentioned that the gun is loaded with an extra quantity of powder, in order to make it throw the shot high ; and accordingly the shooter is enabled to take a good view of the flock, selecting the thickest part of them, and thus, by aiming well under his birds, he can see his mark clearly. Some may object to this, and say that by shooting or aiming high, with less powder, it will come to the same thing ; but no one can tell what exact elevation to give. The shooter may aim one, two, or three feet higher than his birds, but he cannot tell how much ; whereas by the other system he can arrive at greater certainty, and will never fail to kill, if within killing distance. Well, after this digression, we will suppose he is going to take his shot. He throws his eye rapidly over his check rope on his trunnions, and at his check or counter-chain below ; he drops his yoke lines, places his left hand on the butt of the gun, his left elbow resting on his cushion, with the trigger string in his right hand ; taking the most accurate aim, with his head well drawn back, he pulls the string, and when the smoke clears away he sees the water covered with birds before him. Some may object to this mode of using the gun, fearing lest the ornamental features of the face might be obliterated or suffer damage from the recoil, if the face was not well kept out of the way. No doubt that may be very true, but I never knew claret to flow except in one case, where the young shooter did not obey his instructions ; and, happening once, it is not likely to occur again. A spring in this case would be objectionable, as it would allow the gun to come back, the very thing you want to prevent ; and yet all comes back, for the canoe recedes with the recoil, and thus the gun is eased. The advantages of this mode of using the gun are very great : you can take in an immense "field," pointing right and left, up and down, in every direction ; whereas with a long stock running under the arm you are crippled, and limited to a very small space, and barred against flying shots. To show the advantage of this mode, I may mention that we were once working up to geese on a slob, and saw by the telescope that the sentinels were on their legs, with their necks stretched high, announcing by an occasional croak that danger was at hand, whilst the rest of the flock were busy feeding. We knew that there was no use in going right at them, because we knew they would not sit ; so we kept working parallel to the shore, knowing they must cross us, and that we might have a flying shot. Our dodge succeeded well. Up they got, and as they crossed us pretty high, croaking their usual *au revoir*, we tried a random shot, and down came fourteen of them as gracefully as you could desire. In this case the butt of the gun must have nearly touched the bottom of the canoe, and it is only mentioned as a contrast between the merits of long and short stocks. As soon as a shot is fired the stock is strapped down, to get your muzzle safe from water, and you proceed to your cripples.

And "Cigarette" explained his views about the safety of punt guns as follows :

Now let me give my idea about making a punt gun perfectly safe from accident—unless, indeed, it were wilfully fired with felonious intent.

Have a rebounding lock. It seems a very simple thing, but I never saw anyone with one except myself; and, with one, you can't well have a mishap, either by your man's carelessness, or, well, we will call it, your own forgetfulness. My gun is never at full cock, except just before firing, and then I bring the hammer back by means of a lanyard passed through a hole in the thumb piece, and coming inside the punt to my hand as I am laying down.

I have seen, long ago, such fearful accidents from a large gun, that ever since then—and before, of course, rebounding locks were invented—I made my gun safe by placing a small brass block that covered the ignition, whatever it was, all round, without touching it. This was made fast to the trigger lanyard, and served to prevent the string slipping through the fingers when cold or wet. The gun could not go off without removing the block and allowing the striker to reach the ignition, and this was of course done just before firing. At other times the striker was let down on the block, which kept it in its place, and prevented any possible explosion.

With all of this, I entirely concur. As regards the following, I give it in its entirety so as to let both sides be heard:

With regard to putting your shoulder to a punt gun, I am at sea I admit. Why should you ever do so? what is the object gained? You might with as much reason put a small field gun to your body when you sight for a shot. I do not wonder at some punters declaring they cannot often succeed in making good flying shots, when I hear said punters are in the habit of putting their shoulder to their guns. What I wonder at is their ever doing so at all, with even comparative success. With left hand on the short stock, and right hand in loop of trigger lanyard, lying flat on the floor of the punt, your chest supported by well-padded lid of ammunition box, or cushion, your right eye looking along the barrel, a shot to right or left, high or low, is the work of a second.

Now look at the difference where a man has his shoulder to his gun, and to make a quick flying shot has to screw his body round in the contrary direction; what a clumsy performance the latter is to the former should, I think, be pretty plain to most people. I began shooting as a boy, by doing as I was told, and shouldering my punt gun; but little by little I slipped back from my gun, finally left it altogether to shift for itself, and have ever since shot entirely from the hand.

But, that opinions differ on the subject will be seen by the subjoined from "Punter's" pen:

The stock of a punt gun should be strong and heavy, and of sufficient length to come well under the arm when firing, which prevents all danger from recoil, and is an easy method of tipping the gun should the birds take wing. I may have more to say *en passant*; but I do not wish to anticipate "Wildfowler," who writes with much ability for the benefit of those true sportsmen who, with good health and strong constitutions, follow the wary waterfowl upon the "wintry sea."



To this, came the following reply :

No good, workmanlike punt guns are made nowadays with a great lumbering stock, coming far into and blocking up the inside of a punt, where you require every inch of room you can get.

Col. Dumaresq showed me his gun when in Limerick ; he also saw one of mine, such as is depicted in "Wildfowler's" first letter. I very soon made firewood of about a yard and a half of useless stock, and took a pattern from Col. Dumaresq's gun, in having instead just a round knob to rest the hand on. One of the inconveniences of a breechloader is the great weight of the breeching, though I think that Col. Dumaresq's gun was one of the lightest in that respect I ever saw. It had another great advantage : it used paper cartridges. As "Wildfowler" says, they are mostly used with steel cartridges. I would hardly condemn "mine enemy" to the steel ones ; they crack, they bulge, they stick in the barrel, and then the cleaning of them—it is too awful. As my puntsman used to say, he would rather clean ten pair of topboots "than these cartridges."

As to the steel cases used by that gentleman, cracking and bulging, they must have been made very thin, or else of very "precious" steel ! If they stuck in, it was the puntsman's fault. Every cartridge should always be well greased ; then they won't stick. However, I have shown the good and bad points of both paper and steel cartridges, and need not refer again to the subject.

To conclude about set guns, it is contended by the partisans of fixed rests that a simple swivel gun must be awkward to fire at night, as the aim has to be taken afresh for every shot. Mr. Booth, in reply to this objection, explains that he always has the knees that hold the swivel of the gun constructed of such a height that when the barrel is dropped on to the gunwale of the fore deck, it stops at a range of about fifty-five or sixty yards—nearer than which, of course, no one wishes to shoot. By this means, when the gun is raised, some idea of its elevation is come to. It has also this advantage, that the higher the gun is raised, the less will it blacken the fore deck, and the less chance will there be of its burning the breeching.

Of course, the great objection to guns that are worked on knees and swivels is that the guns come so much further inboard than the other style. They drive the shooter a great deal farther astern, and thus a much longer craft is at all

times required when such guns are used; indeed, when a double-handed punt is worked, its length is something tremendous. I have seen some that were nearly twenty-four feet long. Length of craft, however, it should be borne in mind, does not much matter, as you come always end on to the birds; therefore, as far as the birds are concerned, whether a punt be twelve or twenty-four feet long, it is all one to them, its height and breadth only being in view of the flocks. But as regards the working of such punts, of course the longer they are, the less manageable are they for turning, &c.; but for straight sculling or paddling there is really not much difference, as they are all so lightly built, and one man in tolerable trim can always work a double-handed punt with speed, silence, and accuracy, if he is up to his work.

Still, a small craft is always desirable (compatibly with safety and comfort), because in some estuaries a good deal of fowling can be done amongst small creeks, where a long craft could not be readily used, and there a small punt is very handy. For open waters, however, the long punts stand the sea and wind incomparably better, owing to their greater beam.

However, to my views about set guns a correspondent replied :

I quite agree with "Wildfowler" as to the advisability of having the gun set, certainly for night shooting. If you lay your gun so as to clip the water at fifty yards, some nights it will appear to do so at much under, at others much over that distance, and sometimes it will seem to look over everything; so that, unless you have the gun set, it appears to me to be all a fluke if you make a good shot.

But about the trigger string he said :

I do not quite believe in the trigger string recommended by "Wildfowler;" moments are sometimes of great importance in punting, and when duck or teal are "going" there is no time to take a round turn with the string. Hitting the trigger is a much quicker process; if it hurts you, have it padded.

Finally, "St. Kames" gave us his experience of punting in the following graphic note :

All my punt shooting at home was with Capt. Anthony Morgan, late 95th Regt., who always used two punt guns—a light bad-weather one, a

muzzle-loader, with ordinary rope breeching ; and a heavy breech-loader, carrying 16oz. of shot, which worked in a slot with a recoil spring. This spring was always effective but once ; that was when waiting for duck to drift near him off Hare Island banks, five miles inside Cape Clear, with a falling tide. The captain's boat took the ground imperceptibly, the duck drifted within range, the fatal shot was delivered, and lo and behold ! all was confusion on board ; for the recoil spring had broken, and the balance of the recoil force tore up not only the heavy block in which the pivot or stanchion of the gun worked, but with the block a plank out of the boat's bottom, only, of course, because the gallant captain's flat could not retreat from the shot at the rate of several miles an hour, as I had always previously seen her do.

Capt. Morgan always used paper shells, which he made himself, on brass-turned bases ; and I in three years never knew his primer tubes miss, though he used them in both his breechloader and muzzle-loader.

I should wish my memory good enough to recall some of the pictures of the south of Ireland duck shooting I participated in with my old friend. It was no child's play getting caught in those wild bays in my little steam launch, even when unencumbered ; but to see the Crimean veteran, after a rousing shot in some shallow inlet north or south of Kilcoe Castle, strain his iron nerves to get out in his frail craft to me, anchored of course as close as I could so as to intercept, or steam down on, his cripples ; and then the doses we have had of sea, and the pressure—though our own engineers and stokers—of steam we have had to use to nose up against the almost invariable south-wester to Whitehall Point for the evening shot on the Hare Island duck banks. These incidents will be of interest to the intending punter, and show the cynic that punt shooting was not, nor ever will be, potting, but a sport that evokes every kind of hard work, as well as shifts and expedients, tact and temper, and great physical endurance.

Once I tempted Capt. Morgan's pen into *The Field*. I know of few duck harbours at home where he has not punted—from Southampton to Londonderry ; but some thoughtless scribe then sneered at our pet pursuit as not being sportsmanlike, so the captain drew in his literary horns, but if "Wildfowler" were to ask him to again put them forth, I think and hope he would do so.

ST. KAMES.

St. Antonio, Texas, Dec. 5.

I did so ask the gallant captain, with the result that we obtained the two sketches of his invaluable breech-loading punt gun—for which we ought, all of us, to be extremely grateful to him.

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## CHAPTER X.

### THE SETTING OF PUNT GUNS.

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COMING now to the setting of punt guns, there are so many different plans in use that a running description of the leading systems will be desirable. Some men use, besides the swivel which plays in a spring board, a simple crutch forward whereon to rest the muzzle of the gun. The crutch is flat and wide, so as to admit of the barrel being moved somewhat to the right or to the left, according as the line of aim may require, and its screw is sometimes used to raise or to lower the barrel; but this system is, nowadays, very rarely resorted to, whatever may have been the case in olden times. Generally speaking, the gun is trimmed according to her usual "set," as the puntsmen call it, *i.e.*, she is placed on her swivel and rest so as to fire point blank (when the punt is in her usual trim) from eighty to one hundred and twenty yards, the most usual ranges at which the gun is fired.

Now, to the uninitiated this would appear an extraordinary margin for a target; but it should be borne in mind that the punt deck is but a few inches above the sea; and that therefore the gun barrel is almost parallel to the sea, so that its load of shot, which if fired at a target set up perpendicularly eighty yards from its muzzle, would strike it bodily when fired over the open sea, strikes from eighty yards up to one hundred and twenty, one hundred and fifty, and even many more yards,

cutting down every living thing in its passage, like a canister of grapeshot in the ranks of a battalion.

Now, when once the puntsman has found out from experience the proper elevation for ordinary work for his gun he is very chary of altering it, and he is quite right there too; and at sea he never thinks of interfering with it except for a "passing" shot, which but very rarely occurs, and which is seldom successful. (I mean with long-stocked "set" guns be it recollected.) Say, for instance, the puntsman spies a flock of birds flying high and coming past him, he tilts up the gun and fires at them; but the shot is almost a random one unless the birds are very thick together, and in nine cases out of ten the shot is a miss, or next door to it, i.e., knocking over only one or two birds. In short, puntsmen whose guns are long stocked and rigged with rope breechings rely especially on "setting" or "sculling" to their birds. "Flying" shots are rarely practical and rarely successful, although in some special circumstances such shots may be very easy. Anyhow, no provision is made for that tilting up of the gun. It is done on the spur of the moment, and almost on speculation. Now, if a gun barrel is resting on a crutch forward, unless the crutch is made very wide the barrel has no play, either to the left or to the right; and in that case the puntsman must set his punt dead end on to the birds when he takes aim. This is easily enough performed; but when the birds are rather restless a moment lost in giving a stroke of the paddle often costs the punter the loss of a shot, hence the advisability of having a very wide forward crutch or some other suitable forward rest for the gun barrel. One of the best dodges which are resorted to, in order to effect that object, is a sort of wooden billiard rest, called a hand level, whose long handle comes near the stock of the gun. Thus, when the puntsman is within range, he has only to move gently that rest with its handle, and thus he places the gun in any position for firing. Several men at Poole are using that system, whose simplicity and quickness of working are unequalled. The old wheels, screws, &c., of ancient fowlers were very troublesome to attend to, and caused

a waste of time which, in their epoch, perhaps, was not of much importance, as the fowl were then considerably tamer; but now, as soon as you are near enough to fire—fire, say I, and lose no time. Let *that* be your motto. If you delay, some neighbouring puntsman might be punting at some distance from you, fire at his birds, and disturb yours. I therefore consider the hand-rest a most satisfactory implement. I have always used it, and it answers admirably as long as the *forepart* of the deck whereon rests the “rest” is built perfectly flat, rather wide, and is not at all rounded as the whole of punt decks are. It stands to reason that if the deck be sharp pointed, there will be no room to work the rest hardly. And if the deck be wholly convex, the gun will be true on, only when right in the middle of the deck—in which case the puntsman would have first to turn his punt end on, and if he must do so, no movable rest would be required, since the punt could do all. If, however, that part of the deck whereon works the rest is built flat, the hand-rest, by being moved right or left, will keep the gun on its usual level, and it will thus always fire true.

A correspondent, however, misunderstood my meaning and wrote :

It is an error to say that to use it your punt must be built perfectly flat forward, and not at all rounded. It stands to reason that if your punt were flat forward, with no rise from the nose to the cross-piece, moving the rest towards or from you would still keep the barrel at the same level. It is because the deck rises that drawing the rest in or pushing it out causes the elevation of the gun to alter according to your wish.

Again, “Wildfowler” says, the deck must not be rounded, or the rest would not be kept steady. This is wrong, for two reasons. In the first place the deck must be rounded in a punt to prevent ice from freezing on it, and to aid the water to run off, the same as the turtle back forward of a steamer. In the second place the underpart, or two small legs of the rest, ought to be curved to fit the slope or round of the deck. Such being the case, there will be found no difficulty whatever in working the rest by its long handle, to or from lengthways, as may be required by the punter, lying down in his punt hid from view. The upper part of the rest that the barrel lies on would then always be level, and the rest itself may be described as similar in shape to a single span bridge over a river or canal.

But what I meant was that that part of the deck where the rest works only should be flat; and I did not say hori-

zontally flat. I meant that the rise should occur as usual from bows to swivel ; but that the deck should be flat, slanting towards the bows, and *not rounded where the rest is worked*, as otherwise the line of aim would be depressed whenever the rest would be worked over either side.

The hand level is then, under any circumstances, immensely superior to any crutches. The elevating crutches (*i.e.*, crutches that can be raised or depressed by turning the crutches either way to suit the desired end) are all very well in theory. In practice they are very troublesome. When in harbour one can run them up or down, in order to raise or depress either the breech or the muzzle of the gun, so as to trim the latter well within the punt ; but when once that trim is found, there is no further use for the screws, which had better be left alone—*ergo*, why not trim the gun originally properly with fixed crutches ? Some men used to have a never-ending string wherewith to alter the height of these crutches, but these strings always gave way when most needed—or were in the way. If, however, a man has a double-handed punt, screw crutches will be handy in this way, that when he is alone in the punt the trim of the craft is altered by the difference in her freight, and, by raising or depressing the crutches, the true set of the gun will be readily attained ; whereas with fixed crutches it could not be done, and it must be done, since the punt swims quite differently when she carries one, and then two fowlers. *Ergo*, elevating crutches are unnecessary for any but double-handed craft ; and then their proper height must be regulated previous to starting (and not afterwards trifled with), according to the trim of the craft, else they are very puzzling.

All aft crutches now in use are rigged so that the stanchion can be raised simply by turning round and round the piece of wood into which the crutch screw is let. By this means there is no occasion to directly raise the butt end of the gun, as used to be the case. But the fore crutches still labour under the disadvantage of having to remain as they have originally been set under any circumstances, if birds are in sight, since

the wildfowl shooters cannot possibly alter them without showing themselves to the fowl (or using a clumsy string and making a creaking noise), and probably flush them, therefore the hand rest, or hand level, as it is also called, is most decidedly the best plan to be adopted. It is worked in a moment, and accurately worked too; whereas the screw crutches, with or without wheels (for some were worked with wheels), are a complicated, troublesome, and puzzling set of affairs to deal with.

When a gun is fired with a rope breeching and without a swivel, there should be some precaution taken against the after recoil. The rope breeching of course is stretched under the strain of the direct recoil; but the moment this recoil is over, the rope resumes its former length with such effect that it will fling the gun over the bows if the gun is light, and the load had been heavy; and in any case, whether light or heavy, the gun always jumps forward considerably in its after-recoil. To prevent this, a notch used to be cut in the stock in such a manner that in the after recoil it butted against the aft gun crutch. This crutch was generally slightly padded, so as to avoid the wear and tear which otherwise would have slowly but surely spoiled the gun stock. Some people, however, among whom I class myself, dislike this bumping business, even when the stock or the bench is padded; and various devices have been adopted by the lovers of "rope" to prevent the effects of the after recoil in a less primitive fashion than by allowing the gun to roughly bump itself back within its proper breeching. Amongst my own devices were a leather belt or a rope, used as after-recoil apparatus. This was simply a stout belt (or a stout rope), stretched straight and tightly from side to side of the punt, and passing through a ring on the stock of the gun. The advantages of this plan were two-fold. Not only did the belt (or rope) act jointly with the breeching when the recoil took place, but after the recoil it prevented the gun from jumping forward any distance. This plan, when the punt is built so as to stand well the brunt at the sides, answers exceedingly well; and I can recommend it as being



remarkably handy, particularly for breechloaders. For muzzle-loaders it is, of course, equally applicable; but the extra labour of having to unstrap the belt, or unhook the rope, each time the guns have to be reloaded renders it a somewhat troublesome and time-wasting expedient. Still, it is greatly to be preferred to the bump-and-then-be-still notch and bench plan. I am not aware that anyone besides myself has ever resorted to that plan; but of course somebody might have had the same idea, and put it in practice unknown to me. Such things do occur occasionally.

Of course when the guns are built with a swivel, there is no occasion for any after-recoil belt or rope. The swivel plays into a spring board, which, giving way backwards slightly with the recoil, gives way again forward with the after-recoil, and keeps the gun in its place throughout its backward and forward springs. The spring board is fitted across the punt (loosely, of course), being merely shipped into its place.

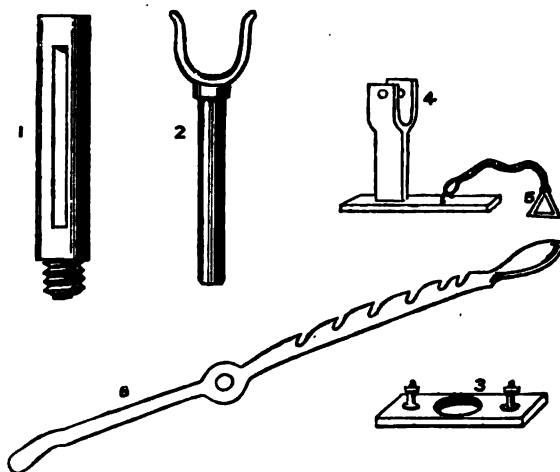
When all these details appeared in *The Field*, "Cigarette" very kindly came to the rescue, and said:

I have tried all manner of ingenious plans for raising a big gun—wheels, screws, and goodness knows what else beside. Screws and wheels answer excellently for raising your gun to shoot over the edge of a mud-bank, and in a few other positions that are similar; but for the sudden shot at birds flying high, and with little time to think or act, by the time you have your screw turned to raise the gun enough for a shot the shot is lost. On this principle I long ago condemned all screw actions, and use instead a lever. It would take a page to describe it clearly, which would not be fair to its simplicity. I can only say that in appearance it is similar to what a coachman uses to lift a carriage off the ground to spin round or take off the wheels, only very much smaller and neater.

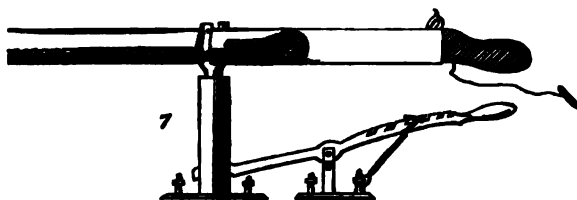
The stanchion fits into a strong tube, that has a slot cut down the side facing the stern of the punt, and running to within an inch or so of the bottom and top of the tube. In this slot, and under the end of the stanchion, works one end of the lever; the other end is the handle, which on pressing downwards up goes your gun to any required height you like, and by means of catches stopping firm for firing.

The subjoined cut, taken from a sketch kindly sent by "Cigarette," will show the apparatus itself, and nothing surely can be better.

**"CIGARETTE'S" ELEVATING LEVER FOR PUNT GUNS.**



The parts represented are : 1. Tube for spur, with slot cut each side; 2, Spur; 3, Socket plate for tube; 4, Support for



lever; 5, Rope and catch for retaining lever; 6, Lever; 7, Appearance in use.

And, respecting my remarks as to "crowding" to birds on ice, and the difficulties I have experienced in getting then satisfactory shots, "Cigarette" wrote :

I notice "Wildfowler," in one of his excellent articles, remarks that when flushing his punt over mud or ice from behind, he finds some difficulty in shooting really well, as his gun being placed at a certain elevation before starting he cannot afterwards alter it. In case you crowded too near upon birds this would be very annoying, and send the shot over them.

Perhaps he will not be above taking a hint from me. Shooting once on a partially frozen sea abroad, I had much the same trouble, till I hit upon the plan of having a long spare handle, that was made to screw into the end of the rest handle. I found this answer pretty well, but

not so well as I wished, as on pushing the rest in or out it used to make a rather alarming, (to birds at least), bumping noise.

The yacht's carpenter suggested grease, on the strength of having once mended my punt I suppose; it was not a bad idea, and so I greased the feet and top of the rest. This was a great improvement; and a yet better one, was getting a small roller fitted in the top of the rest, for the gun to lie on; I could then, from astern of the punt, by means of the long handle, raise or lower the gun in a moment with great ease and quickness.

I may add that I always fastened my trigger string through a hole in the end of the long handle, by this means I had my firing and elevating all in one hand, and frequently used both with success at the same moment.

Instead of having the wooden stretcher that is generally used to put over the stock, and under the combing, to keep the muzzle up in a sea, I find it far better and simpler to have a loop of strong leather fastened in the floor of the punt, through which the stock of the gun can be slipped and unslipped in a moment. The wooden stretcher is so liable to jump off, especially when towing a punt in a wave.

In my opinion "Cigarette's" apparatus is admirable, and his double-handle to his rest, and his string, are most ingenious dodges.

I must not bring this chapter to a close without giving the following letter from Mr. T. M. Pike, of Malvern:

A great divergence of opinion seems to exist on what is a very simple matter, viz., whether a fixed rest is better or not to insure the proper elevation of the gun, especially at night. Surely a movable one is much preferable, and all the advantages of the fixed one can be easily obtained by the old-fashioned device of a rest with a wooden handle coming back into the punt. All you want is some point at which, when the end of the handle comes to it, your gun has a certain known position, say, levelled to kill at 60 yards. You can tell then on the darkest night exactly how your gun is, by merely feeling where the end of your rest is, and without any difficulty you can elevate or depress the muzzle by pulling in or running out your rest at will. Of course you must keep your punt in one trim to do this; but this applies equally for a fixed rest.

Ice, in hard weather, will often serve you a nasty trick, by accumulating in a wonderful way on the deck and bows of your boat. I see "Wild-fowler" advises a flat deck.

(I have already explained that I do not mean the whole of the deck to be flat, but only that part on which the foot of the rest works. And where the surface is flat, it should not be horizontal, but should slope towards the stem.)

But let us see Mr. Pike's arguments :

Now this, in my opinion, is about the very worst fault a boat can have, for various reasons, the chief being this very accumulation of ice. On a flat deck the water that is always coming on the deck of a punt does not run off, but freezes. More keeps coming on, the result being that the boat is quite loaded down. You have often to knock it off with an oar, or, better, with your ice pole which makes a noise, frightens away birds, and often is apt to make your boat leak. This latter, a most horrible nuisance in a punt, you won't find out before the thaw. A similar reason exists in a lop. Your flat deck will not free itself ; and, under sail especially, a boat with a flat deck will be forced bodily down if she gets her nose under a longish wave or two, while a round deck will shoot off the water and rise through almost anything. Again, you must have much higher sides with a flat deck, which, of course, hold wind, and make a boat "show" a good deal. Some of the boats lately built at Poole have from six to eight inches round to their gunning beams. I never heard any complaint as to the rests not acting on them. The foot of the rest must be angled to suit.

The elevating screw is an important adjunct to the punt fittings ; and, though every gunner has seen it, yet a word or two might well be said on this subject, as it is a wonderful assistance to shooting on the wing with the big gun. The desideratum is, of course, to run your gun up as quick as possible, to get a high elevation for firing if necessary. The screws themselves do not vary much ; some are merely turned up with a handle. The best fitted-up that I have seen was Capt. Stokes's ; he had a wheel with a groove at the bottom of his screw, round which a piece of line was made to work through a small block, fastened on to one of the knees of the punt. Hauling on this line ran up the screw, with the gun on it, with wonderful quickness, the screw being one with a double thread. The only difficulty with regard to this plan was one which I daresay some others have experienced, viz., that the line is apt to shrink or get light, according to the state of the dampness it was in. This he obviated by attaching the block to the timber by means of a piece of wire, whose length he could rapidly alter, by twisting or untwisting it. Of course the line round the groove in the wheel was spliced, to run smooth. Hence its length could not be altered easily, while, if it did not fit the groove to a nicety, it either fell out or worked too light, to run the screw up quickly. This dodge with the wire acted capitally, and the way in which the old captain would run up his gun and knock down the black geese high up in the air, from his punt under sail, was worth seeing. One day as he was returning from one of his trips round the harbour, just at the corner in Wareham Channel, where the "lake," which runs close in up to his door, turns off from the main body of water, a large northern diver ("Tommy Loo," being the name they are known by here), came tearing down the course of the channel, bound for the open sea—high up in the air. Old Stokes saw it coming, and ran up his gun, preferring to fire the charge at this sort of game rather than keep the gun loaded. Bang goes the gun, down comes the diver with a

tremendous splash (it weighed 14lb.) The steamer was passing along, and the captain was astonished out of all propriety, for he bellowed out at the top of his voice, "How the —— did you get the shot up there?" The bird certainly did look when falling almost perpendicular to the punt.

Ice cannot accumulate on a punt, if my plan is *strictly* acted up to, and the screw I hold in horror—but I like to let every sportsman be heard. From a free discussion only, can truth and information come to light, and though I do not advocate or indorse Mr. Pike's plans, it is but fair that everybody should have a hearing. Doubtless the Poole men are partisans of his system.

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## CHAPTER XI.

### RECOIL AND AFTER-RECOIL APPARATUSES.

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To start the subject with, in my opinion, a punt gun should *never* be made fast to a punt. The reasons for this are of too obvious a nature to need much enlarging upon.

Sometimes, when a breeching-rope is used, it is passed through a hole in the stem of the punt; in which case, should a capsize occur, the punt will be dragged probably to the bottom by the weight of the gun, if the rope is made also fast to the gun.

Most guns, however, can be readily freed, the eyes being easily slipped on and off the trunnions or hook, and, in the case of a spiral spring, the swivel is out in an instant if you but tip up the butt of the gun. Capsizes, however, are of rare occurrence; still they may occur, and then, if the punt were freed, it would help the gunner to keep his head above water anyhow.

In short, both gun and punt should be independent from each other, that is to say, the gun should be readily freed in case of a mishap.

I now come to the various methods which are resorted to in order to take up the recoil and after-recoil of punt guns.

In Chapter III., I gave a description of Mr. Booth's gun. Another gunner of some thirty years' standing, Mr. Harmer, who does most of his gunning near Yarmouth and along the east coast has also written me, and sent me a sketch of his

punt with gun rigged on. He uses his gun on a plain swivel pin, working on an iron knee, like Mr. Booth ; but, unlike that gentleman, he does not resort to any rope-breeching whatsoever.

This is all very well as long as the bottom board holds tight ; but supposing it did not, or the iron knee gave way in its fixings ? What then ?

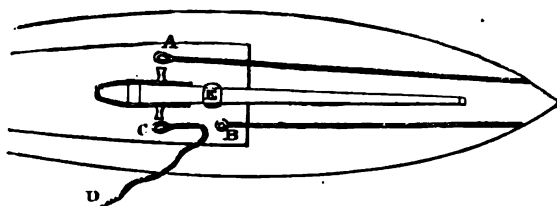
Again my correspondent (whose opinions I hold in the highest estimation, though we, now and then, "agree to differ," and in that right kindly spirit which ought always to be the case with sportsmen), says that he has used rope breechings, spiral springs, and fixed swivels, and he could find no advantage whatever in the shooting of the gun, either as to pattern or penetration, with the two former ; therefore, for some years, he has stuck to the fixed swivel, and has found everything connected with it less trouble, &c., and that the gun does every bit as well with it. "This is my experience," he adds, "but I dare say you will not agree with it." Well, now, I certainly believe that a confined gun must necessarily shoot harder, since, no recoil being allowed, increased driving power must be insured to some extent. But what I argue is—does this slight increase in driving power compensate for the danger which might occur through firing such a hard-and-fast big gun ? I think most decidedly not. The pattern and penetration of really good guns with rope breeching or spring recoil apparatus, are satisfactory enough, to all intents and purposes ; and, as I pointed out, guns thus rigged can be worked in any punt, however light, almost ; and this is a great advantage. Now, my correspondent works specially in powerful seaworthy punts, which are sculled to birds, and in which he finds that there is strength enough to bear the brunt of such rough work as he alludes to ; but a large majority of the punts now in use, unless specially fitted for the purpose, would be rent asunder were such systems resorted to with them. In short, in my opinion a big gun works smoothly and safely with either breeching rope or spiral spring ; and it does neither without one of these. Indeed, that the safety is very questionable with a confined punt gun is shown by the fact

that Mr. Booth, who has had as much practice as most men, if not more, since he is always at it in all parts of the coast, although he uses a confined gun, takes care to generally work it also with a rope breeching, "in case of accident," as he himself puts it. This quite coincides with my views in that respect, and I confess I should not like to do without in the usual run of punts now afloat.

However, there is the fact that amongst the various ways of taking up the recoil, some light guns have been rigged directly on a swivel, and the recoil is borne entirely by a knee, fixed by bolts and screws to the bottom plank of the punt as shown in cut, next page, of Mr. Harmer's gun and knee.

But, in order to treat the subject systematically, as many correspondents have written inquiring about the various methods of taking up the recoil of punt guns, I have thought it desirable to give cuts illustrating these various plans, so as to make my previous explanations more readily grasped and understood, and show the advantages and disadvantages of every plan at a glance. Fig. 1 represents Mr. Booth's plan of

*Fig. 1.*

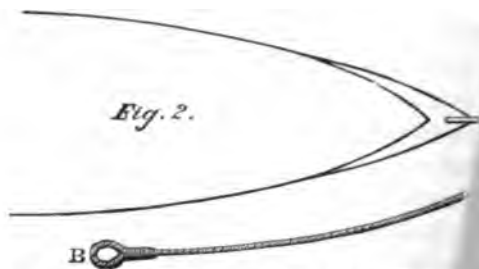


rope-breeching—the spectator looking down on the punt from above. The breeching rope, it will be perceived, goes round the stem, and is in two pieces. A is the plain eye on long piece; B is the eye with thimble on long piece; C the plain eye on short piece; D, the end of short piece which goes through B, and is made fast, and brought back inboard. By these means, no matter how much the ropes may have stretched or shrunk, the breeching can always be made taut—a very great point, this; A and C, of course, ship over the gun's trunnions. Mr. Booth, besides the rope, uses also an



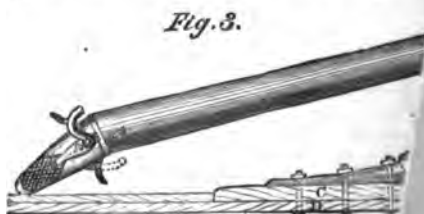
iron swivel and knee, and E is the iron band which the gun to the swivel.

Fig. 2 represents another punter's plan of breech



rope, A B, being laid flat on the deck, B is hook fixed underneath the gun stock. In this defect is that no provision is made for count shrinking, or stretching, of the rope, and neither stretch nor shrink, it is a bad way recoil, since the rope does not ease it to course, is fixed to the stem of the punt.

In Fig. 3 we have Mr. Harmer's system



to the bottom plank of the punt. A is and C an extra board laid on bottom whole being secured by bolts. The plan is, that it does not provide at all being held fast; hence, if the punt might break the swivel pin, or wren. To provide against these, the fixing made very strong, and as the bottom must be made and joined very strong give way, tear open the side plank sink. Such a plan is very unsati





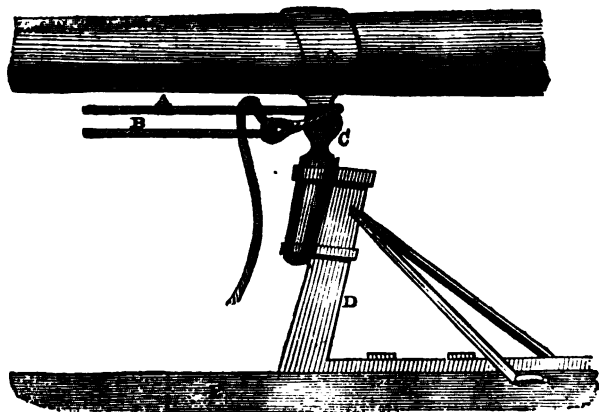
passably with light guns and light loads, and it generally throws the shot high.

Sometimes, the punt gun was rigged on the bows direct. I have in my possession an old print, in which that system is shown, and there is no recoil apparatus of any kind. I take it that the bows saw pretty rough work now and then by that style of punting; but of course, when the gun is of small bore, the punt takes up its very moderate recoil bodily, so to speak, and suffers but little; whereas, should a heavy stanchion have been thus fired, no doubt the sides would have been ripped open, in spite of the usual cross-pieces which were screwed on to strengthen them. Anyhow, guns so confined as to have no play, fire badly. They jar everything—themselves included—and throw their shot either up or down, according to their weight and their loads.

The rope-breeching, on the contrary, gives excellent results. Manilla rope, particularly, takes up the recoil so well that no very perceptible jarring occurs, and the gun fires very true. The longer the breeching, to a certain extent, the easier the recoil is taken up.

Mr. E. T. Booth uses also an iron knee similar to Mr.

*Fig. 4.*

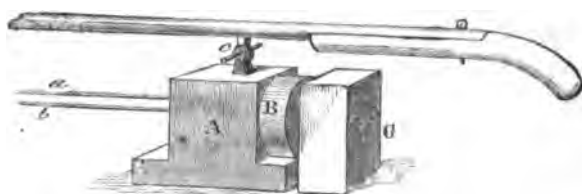


Harmer's; but, in case of accident, he also provides a rope-breeching. Fig. 4 shows his system: A and B are the two

ends of a breeching-rope, which is passed around the stem of the punt, as already stated. The rope has a single eye, as shown. C is the swivel pin; D the iron knee, strengthened by two iron rods: and E is the bottom plank of punt. Thus, when A B are made taut and fast, the recoil is mainly taken up by D; but should C give way, or D be wrenched off the bottom of the plank, A B would prevent further damage by holding the gun steady to the stem, so that both the stem and the bottom plank would share the brunt of the recoil.

In Fig. 5 we have a system devised by "a gentleman who

*Fig. 5.*

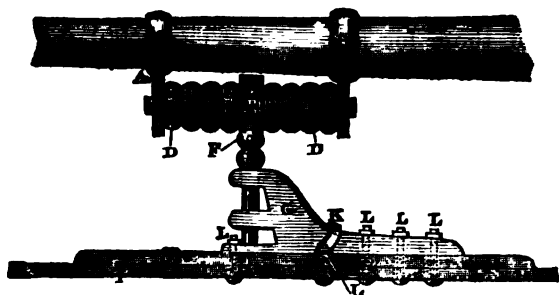


punts on the Tamar." This system is, I am told, applied to some of their punt guns by Messrs. Holland, of Bond-street. In this plan *a* and *b* are two iron rods, fixed to the bow of the boat, and rivetted at the other end to a wooden block, C, and passing through A and B. A is another wooden block, which supports the gun, and slides along the two bars. B is an indiarubber buffer, which breaks the force of A's recoil. *c* is a swivel, by which the gun can be elevated or turned. Now, in my opinion, the fact that the rods *a b* are fixed to the stem of the punt is a defect. Were a heavy gun, heavily loaded, to be fired, there would be great danger that the rods would wrench the stem, for, the recoil being very sudden and very violent, the one buffer which is provided would not be sufficient to deaden it. Another objection to the plan is the great amount of room it takes in the punt; and as the whole apparatus is under the deck, it cannot be readily inspected whenever an inspection is needed, which should be done every time one is going punting, to see if all is right. For light guns and light loads, however—provided the punt is well-built, of course—I dare say the plan would be effective.

Indeed, its inventor declares that it answers admirably with his own gun, a light one.

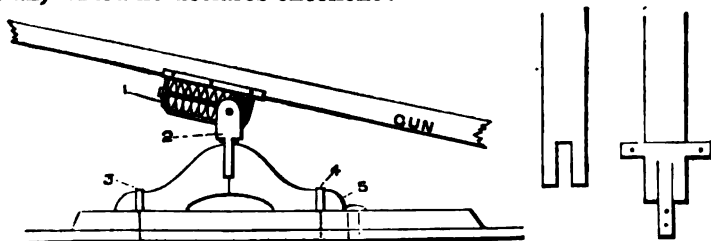
Then we have the recoil spring invented by Col. Hawker, some idea of which will be given by the cut at page 32. I have already pointed out its defects, however, and I now come to a plan which has been devised conjointly by Mr. Hugh A. Silver, of 66 and 67, Cornhill, and myself. Mr. Silver, in the course of conversation, suggested indiarubber buffers, and I then drew the following sketch, which does away entirely

*Fig. 6.*



with Col. Hawker's objectionable steel springs. A and B are the iron bands to whose projections the iron rod D D is fixed. This rod, D D, slides through C, the iron top of the swivel head. E, E, E, E, &c., are indiarubber buffers; F is the swivel; G the iron knee; K an iron band, which, conjointly with the bolts L, L, L, L, hold the knee fast to the bottom plank I of the punt. H is an extra board, providing thickness of bottom plank so as to prevent its being wrenched off, or slit open by the bolts.

Mr. W. T. Everitt, of Lowestoft, also sent me the following plan, which he declares excellent:



The gun, it will be perceived, is fitted with—1, Col. Hawker's recoil spring; 2 is the swivel-pin; 3 is a loose galvanised iron band; 4 is the band and heel-plate, which cover 5, a piece of cork or a lump of india-rubber. On the right of the sketch the heel-end of the block is shown, firstly, naked; and, secondly, when covered with the band. This brings the list of leading apparatuses to an end.

Now, when Col. Hawker invented his patent recoil frame, it was thought that the acme of perfection and safety was attained. My opinion is that mine is the best, and I doubt much whether the old Poole rope-breeching was not the best, after all, of those formerly used. The spiral spring of the colonel's invention makes the gun work "hard," as professionals express it—i.e., kick suddenly, and throw up the shot somehow; besides which, unless the spring is nickel-plated, it is liable to get attacked by rust, and, if a breakage should occur, look out for squalls!

To this, however, a sportsman demurred, saying:

In the matter of a spiral spring recoil apparatus, if you get a good one, there is nothing makes the gun work so evenly, or shoot so true, and with so little kick. "Wildfowler" is mistaken in saying, should the spring break, then "look out for squalls." There is no danger in a spring should it snap, because the spring is squeezed up by the recoil of the gun; if it was the reverse, of course it would be otherwise.

I am working now with a gun that carries two pound of shot, and which snapped the spring when I first used it; it takes up the recoil, however, just as well as ever, and as safely as if not broken.

And Mr. Harmer, on the same subject, wrote to me as follows:

It is a very singular thing, but when using a spiral spring (and a friend fared the like with his) the *swivel pin* broke off *like a carrot*, and *no harm* came to either of us from the guns, which merely fell over on their sides alongside the knees. The swivel pins in both cases were exactly the same size (very thick) as the one I used with the fixed swivel before and since. I accounted for mine going from a small bladder (a flaw), as it were, in the middle of the iron; but the "pin" of my friend's gun was as sound and good as possible.

These two accidents are exceedingly curious, not only in their coincidence, but in their very nature. They show, however, how very sudden and irresistible is the recoil of a

big gun, and how necessary it is to provide for any such contingencies. Of course, the recoil spent its force in breaking the pins. Had the said pins, however, not been very stout, it is more than probable that the two punters would have been severely handled about the face, chest, and collar bone, had any kicking been left in the guns after their unlooked-for performance.

The whole affair seems to me extraordinary, but of course, it stands to reason that if the shooter does not shoulder his gun, it does not much matter if the spring snaps. Should the breakage, however, occur whilst shouldering, the suddenness of the extra recoil caused by the snap would be dangerous to the shooter's collar bone. By the bye, I wonder if any puntman has ever tried a "Silver" pad to a punt gun. If made of tolerable thickness, I should imagine it would answer remarkably well in connection with a recoil rope or steel spring; but I have never yet seen it in use, although most, if not all, 4-bore, or other large bore shoulder guns for wildfowl shooting, are now pretty generally fitted with it.

However, concerning breakages, these have also occurred with rope-breechings; but for these breakages the puntmen had only themselves to thank. They are so proverbially careless, that the only wonder is that they don't meet with many more accidents than they do. This nonchalance is all the more surprising, because the effect of a breeching giving way is of so terrible a nature that one would think men who expose themselves to it almost every day or night throughout the season would be rather cautious to avoid any chance of an unpleasantness of the sort. But in reality what do we see? Why, look at the row of punts and punt guns at Heybridge Basin, on the (Essex) Blackwater, or on the "hard" at Poole, or any other estuary where punting is extensively practised, and let the visitor inspect carefully all punt guns and their breechings, and he will find that nine-tenths of the latter are hardly fit for service. This is a fact. The men are so reckless and so bold, that they would rather run the risk of a crack on the jaw than take the trouble of placing fresh rope-breechings to their guns. Now, daring, and all that sort of



thing, is all very well ; but I say that accidents that can be prevented ought to be prevented, especially when the precautions to be taken are of so slight a nature.

Of course, as regards the use of steel *versus* rope in the recoil apparatus, opinions will differ ; but I confess that I side with many professionals, and like rope a great deal better than steel. On the other hand, even with a good long rope-breeching, I do not go the length of invariably advocating the placing of one's shoulder to the gun's stock. It is all very well to tell you that, if you place your shoulder firmly against the stock as you are lying in your punt, and see that nothing is in the way against your feet, the recoil will only make your body glide on the floor, and do you no harm. I say it may do you harm some day if you chance to fire a heavy load. With a good heavy gun, and only twelve ounces of shot, the plan may do ; but when you come to fire 1lb., or more, then I say it will be infinitely better if, notwithstanding the best recoil apparatus or rope-breeching in the world, your shoulder stands clear of the stock. Some men pad their right shoulder heavily, and can do the deed at all times ; but, since the gun can be fired without running any such risks, why chance them ?

However, Mr. Harmer in his note went on to say :

As a precaution with a fixed swivel, and in fact also with a spiral spring, *à la* Hawker, a *preventer* rope might be attached, but not a rope-breeching in that sense of the term.

Of course, here he means that the preventer rope should be attached above the pin of the gun. That plan is just that pursued by Mr. Booth, who uses a rope-breeching with a single eye, made fast round the lower projecting part of the band that holds the bolt and the swivel—a very wise precaution this for all confined guns. When, however, guns are built to take breeching-ropes only as a means of taking up the recoil, it should be remembered that the whole brunt of the recoil is then borne by the stem of the punt, and the punt must then be strongly built, so as to stand it without fear of a mishap. The chock, or block of wood in the stem, should be of great strength. A solid block of oak, 14in. or 16in.

thick at the very least, should be used. Failing that, accidents will occur, particularly with powerful guns. Mr. Booth gives me an instance of this. He says:

I saw a punt in Scotland that a gentleman had had built for a large breechloading gun. It was a most frightful model, just like a fiddle case; and, in addition to its beauty, the builder, who had followed "Hawker" to the best of his ability, had certainly put in a block of wood in the stem, but of no strength. (Hawker does not mention of what strength this stem piece ought to be.) The consequence was, when the gun was fired the breeching tore away the stem and crumpled up the punt as if it had been built of paper. Luckily the gunner had funked and fired the shot with a long string.

I have seen a somewhat similar case myself, at Poole. A fellow, who, I was subsequently told, had built his punt himself, was just trying her and his gun one afternoon, when I happened to be strolling near the "hard." It was low tide, and he had set up a mud patten as a target, about ninety yards off; and from the "hard," where his punt was lying, he fired away three or four rounds. I looked at the punt afterwards, and, in answer to his query, told him I thought her a poor model, and weak for'ard. "Weak for'ard, be blowed!" said he, "she is all right;" and his chums looked at him approvingly. But, when the tide came up, and he launched her, she filled with water at once. The firing of the gun, when the punt was hard and fast on the "hard," of course had made the recoil still stronger than it would have been had the craft been afloat at the time, and it had started the sides with a vengeance. The gun was not a big one, either—just to carry comfortably some 12oz. or so of shot. So imagine the result if the gun had been still heavier, and the amateur had gone away among the Poole harbour flats, far from shore, in order to try it! It is always a mistake to have a cockleshell of a punt. I would rather have more labour and feel safe, than go in a punt which I might carry on my back, but which, at any time, might prove to be my coffin. And I think sensible men will say that I am right there.

Views differ wonderfully amongst puntsmen as to the best methods of taking up both recoil and after-recoil.

Respecting the former, a correspondent, "Punter," said:

The best recoil spring I have ever met with is a good hemp tape "rove" through a hole in the stem and run over the deck, with a good stout thimble spliced into the end; a hook should be "seized" on the stock of the gun, which may be shipped into the thimble at pleasure. I had Col. Hawker's spiral spring fitted to my punt gun, but did not like it; the strain on the boat is too great, especially if grounded.

And as concerns taking up the after-recoil, as I have already explained, my plan consists simply in stretching a strap through a ring under the stock from side to side of the punt. (This, of course, I need not add, is when using a rope-breeching for the recoil.)

To this, however, "Cigarette" objected thus:—

With reference to taking up the reverse recoil, "Wildfowler's" plan of having a rope or strap stretched from side to side of the punt, and through a ring under the stock, is not nearly so good as the old-fashioned method.

His manner of rigging it not only blocks up the footway of your punt forward, but is a great inconvenience in a drop-down breechloader, though I have seen it used with a Snider action. The way I allude to is to have a rope fastened by a clip hook under the stock of the gun, and thence to a ring in the floor of the punt. This plan, as it is rigged fore and aft, has the advantage of being out of the way of everything, and also of being able to be used to keep your breeching ropes from shrinking when the gun is taken out for the night.

What punter does not know the bother of finding his ropes so shrunk, after a wet or frosty night, that, on putting the loops on either side over the trunnions of his gun, its centre of gravity is thrown several inches too far forward?

But, I think that "Cigarette" is mistaken there. I think my plan is immensely superior to the plan of having a rope fastened by a clip hook under the stock of the gun, and thence to a ring in the floor of the punt, as advocated by him, but the fact that I use breechloaders, and have my ammunition box under the deck in front of me, will readily account for my partiality to my plan. By my system, access to the under deck is free. Without moving almost, I can draw my ammunition box under the breech of the gun, take out what I want, shove the box back, and have done. Were I to resort to a rope fastened to the floor, it would be in my way. With the use of muzzle-loaders, the reverse was the case, as the ammunition box was pretty generally always kept astern. Hence

the difference of opinion between "Cigarette" and myself on the subject.

The inconvenience referred to by "Cigarette," of finding the recoil rope shrunk, and thus throwing the gun out of its proper set when putting the loops over the trunnions, is best remedied by having two loops at each end of the rope, by which means either one or both extra loops can be used at will, so as to fit the gun, or using the plan resorted to by Mr. Booth, and described at page 87. Trying to keep the recoil rope from shrinking, by the after-recoil rope being set against it, is unsatisfactory. The ropes should be allowed any shrinking they may experience, otherwise they lose all their elasticity, get as stiff as a stick, and lack all those qualities which have endeared rope to the lovers of big guns. Has not "Cigarette" noticed that after thus stretching his breeching rope the strain was always stiffer than usual on the punt when the gun was fired?

My plan answers two ends. It checks the after recoil efficiently, and the strap being very stout and good, if the rope-breeching were to give way—such things occur now and then—it would prevent the gun from injuring the gunner.

"Skolopax" uses another system. He says:

A  $\frac{1}{4}$ -in. hole is bored in the under side of the projecting square part of the breech, about the centre of it, and tapped to the depth of about  $1\frac{1}{4}$ -in. to receive a ring bolt, the eye of it to take a  $\frac{1}{4}$ -in. pin; the use of this is to take a piece of strong galvanised chain—neater than rope—to act as a counter-check to the gun in case the rope breeching may give way, which has sometimes happened. This chain is an appendage to the gun never removed, and has a hook at the end of it, to be hooked into another chain so loosely that it shall not take up the recoil, but shall just receive it, and check the gun from coming back to the shooter in case the rope should give way. My present rope breeching is  $1\frac{1}{2}$ -in. in circumference, as it is well stretched and wormed; it must have been more when new. It is of best white Manilla, and has been in use seven or eight years. The eyes spliced in the end of it to receive the trunnions are about seven inches long, so that they are easily opened when they are being released from the trunnions, for the purpose of loading; and neat oblong or oval rings (don't laugh at Paddy) should be placed on the eyes, so that they can be drawn up tight to the trunnions, and thus prevent the possibility of the rope flying off by the shock of the recoil. Perfect security, obtained by a little trouble, gives the shooter confidence, in which one of the greatest pleasures of wildfowl shooting consists.

He also gave his plan of crutches, viz. :

The crutch should have a stem or shank to it 8-in. long, to rest on a stepped block on the bottom of the canoe, so as to raise the gun or lower it as required. It should also have a roller in it, to facilitate the operation of running the gun up and down for loading. The crutch can be moved back and forward in an iron frame, and tightened with a couple of bolts to meet the difficulty occasioned by the contraction and expansion of the rope breeching, which, after it has been well stretched for some seasons, and wormed, becomes so hard that it does not admit moisture, and scarcely requires the crutch to be altered. I had nearly forgotten to mention that the iron frame holding the crutch is secured by a nut and screw into the centre of the gun beam ; the other end of it has a  $\frac{3}{4}$ -in. hole through it, which takes a " muzzle " and chain, and also two upright iron supporters ; to this chain the counter chain on the gun is hooked with a long hook, that will not fly out with the jerk of the recoil. When the proper link has been ascertained, it should be marked with a piece of string or copper wire. Where the nut of the crutch apparatus is screwed on the fore side of the gun beam, a piece of about four inches square is cut out of the deck, and covered with a piece of sheet copper. This can easily be removed when it is required to get at the nut.

All of which plans are decidedly very ingenious.

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## CHAPTER XII.

### PUNTS.

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AND, now, to punts.

It is a most remarkable thing that the greatest diversity of opinion reigns amongst puntsmen as to the proper sort of punt to be used. Some like the narrow punts which are "paddled," others scoff at the idea, and go in for "sculling" and broad-beamed craft. Generally speaking, however, it will be found that this great diversity of opinion arises chiefly from the nature of the water which the sportsmen patronise. In a sheltered estuary, with plenty of creeks, no very great extent of open water, and many shallows, a light punt is desirable, because it can be used almost anywhere, paddled or poled up narrow creeks, or crowded over the dry, *i.e.*, pushed over the saltings from creek to creek, as occasion requires; but where no such work is needed, then absence of weight is not of so much consequence. Still, extremes must be avoided, and I would not advocate the use of a Thames barge exactly. A good, handy, and safe punt is of quite as much importance and consequence as a good punt gun; in fact, more so, because, if the gun is a worthless one, barring its bursting, if it gives no sport, it does no damage; whereas a weak punt is very dangerous, and a heavy one is arm-breaking and heart-breaking to boot.

If a man goes in for double-handed punting, of course he does not mind weight so much, as his man has nothing to do but to attend to the craft, and all his skill being bent on that, and that alone, he gets on well; but in single-handed punting a heavy punt handicaps the shooter fearfully, unless he is a

very powerful man, because he has to mind the gun, the birds, and the punt, and unless he can handle the latter without much comparative exertion, he is soon knocked up.

Some puntsmen, for that very reason, object to oak sides. I do, for my own paddling or sculling, because, what with a 100lb. or so gun, my own body, and a heavy punt, I would find it no joke to have to go far. In a double-handed punt, however, I think that oak sides are everlasting, and the evil of greater weight is not then felt so much as I explained above; but for a single-handed punt I opine that elm or deal are very good materials indeed. As, however, in severe weather the sides are apt to be cut through by ice when punting on inland waters (for, at sea the ice is soft, *i.e.*, "rotten," in the vast majority of cases), it is as well to provide against this emergency by having the punt coppered from stem to stern nearly right up to the deck. In this view of mine Mr. Booth entirely concurs, and no doubt other gunners will also agree. I have been several times nearly drowned by venturing in borrowed punts which were not coppered, when a good many ice floes were about, and Mr. Booth tells me that he half filled a boat with water two or three times before he could reach shore. I therefore think the precaution of coppering, a very good one—nay, indispensable, when any severe winter-work on fresh-water lakes or broads is in contemplation. Oak stands the work well, but in time the sides get roughed and thinned, so that on the whole the coppering plan is the best.

I do not like clinker-built punts (and in this again Mr. Booth is of my opinion), because the slightest ripple in the water causes a constant and bothering noise. Mr. Folkard, however, does not think as we do. He says :

I heard an objection raised to clench-built punts, the punter stating that, but for the "tell-tales," he could have heard the birds feeding, and so discovered their whereabouts; whereas the noise of the water rippling against his clench-built punt not only precluded him from so doing, but frightened the birds, and caused them to take wing. But the statement appears scarcely feasible, because, by resting a moment on the paddles the "tell-tales" become silent, and they certainly cannot be heard by birds beyond forty or fifty yards' range. I have never found the smallest inconvenience myself from the "tell-tales."

Now, according to my experience, tell-tales are a nuisance. It is all very well when you are punting single-handed ; you can stop at any time when you fancy you hear the fowl a distance ahead ; but if you are in a double-handed punt, not only is the noise of " tell-tales " greater, but the difficulty of making your man understand when to stop or to go on is troublesome. I use a code of signals myself when thus in " warm quarters." Thus, one touch of my foot means " stop " if we are going on at the time ; and *vice versâ*, it means to " go on " if we had stopped. Two running touches of the foot means to go on slowly and cautiously—what on steamers the telegraph boy would call " easy." Well, now, with a clench-built punt in a ripple, it is a palpable nuisance to have to stop at all, so as to get rid of the " tell-tales ; " and how Mr. Folkard can reconcile this with his expressed opinion that he has never found the *smallest inconvenience* from the " tell-tales " I do not know, since it is, of his own showing, an undoubted inconvenience to have to stop, especially in a pursuit, and at a time when moments are precious. I, for one, object *in toto* to clinker-built punts on that ground ; and Mr. Booth also dislikes them.

One has quite enough to contend with nowadays, in order to overreach the fowl, without being annoyed by a punt which prevents you from hearing their noises about you ; and, moreover, if a clinker-built punt be propelled forward by a vigorous sculler, I have no doubt that its " tell-tales " would disturb the fowl. It might not do so when a small punt is being paddled to the birds, because the progress made is much slower then, and the " tell-tales " consequently are not near so loud ; but, anyhow, I would rather not use a clinker-built punt if I could have another.

Perhaps this expression of opinion on my part will rouse the ire of clench-built punt lovers, for it is a most remarkable thing in the history of punting that the hold which this pursuit takes upon its votaries is so strong, that they positively come to look upon their guns, and especially their punts, as though they were almost things of life, and they actually dote on them, so that it is not always safe to find fault with a professional's



punt, for instance—for, in his heart of hearts, she is the best, dearest, handiest thing that ever lived—in a sea—and anyone who dares to say anything to the contrary is—well, there is no saying what he is, in the worthy man's estimation.

Now, some people who have probably never seen a duck or a widgeon in their lives, except in a poulterer's shop, will wonder how men can be so enthusiastic in the pursuit of punt-ing. If such people only knew the excitement of the affair ! I have often experienced it, and when, after much work, I have beheld the host—covering sometimes an acre of ground—right in front of the punt, and I was fingering the trigger-string and eyeing the lot with unbounded enthusiasm, I would not have changed places, not for worlds, on any account, with anybody. Such things are not to be had for the asking, and money cannot buy them ; you must expose and exert yourself to get them ; they require nerve, spirit, and fearlessness, and luck as well as skill ; and the rarity and dangers of the thing constitute its wonderful charm. It is a sweet which only a comparative few have tasted in all its glory, and, like a rare gem, its value is estimated precisely by its rarity ; in short, the many dangers and difficulties which accompany the pursuit render it a most fascinating sport. And as to the fondness which we bear to our punts and our guns, that feeling is something akin to the love which a sailor bears to his ship, a yachtsman to his yacht, a hunting man to his favourite hunter, a sportsman to his best pointer or setter ; and who shall say “ nay ” to the direction of a man's tastes ? My most pleasant hours, barring none, have been spent in a punt, and I loved that punt—there ! And if, by any mischance, there was no longer any wildfowl shooting to be had in this world—well, I don't want to be hard on the rest of sports and pleasures—but what a miserable world this world would be to be sure, to me and to many more !

When a punt is likely to have to be towed by a smack or yacht, or other sailing boat, she should invariably be built with a strong chock in the stern, with a ring or hole through which to fasten the end of the tow-rope, so as to lift the stern out of

water. Otherwise she will roll, fill, and sink if the speed gets at all high. So, all precautions had better be taken when the craft is being built; otherwise contingencies will arise which a little foresight might have easily avoided. I need not add that, when a punt is likely to see very hard usage, she should be especially strongly built in all parts, but particularly in her sides and timbers. The rest may be light, but the ribs must be strong, and the sides substantial. Of course there are special circumstances in which it would be desirable that even the decks should be substantial, but, as a rule, this is not a *sine quâ non*—i.e., as long as the punter deals only with fowl, his deck may be as light as can be; but if he indulges in seal shooting and porpoise shooting, and stows the seals or porpoises away under deck, he should either have a very powerful craft, or else make doubly sure that his prey is dead. A man told me that he once shoved a seal under deck in his punt, thinking it was dead; but it was only stunned, and, coming to life again, in its struggles to escape it rent the punt and split the deck, so that the fellow, after shooting it once more, had to row his leaking punt to a flat, and wait for assistance from a chum. A similar accident occurred to Mr. Booth, who tells me :

I once stowed a seal of about 1½cwt. under the stern deck of a single punt, and was then sculling out after a lot of pintail, with my feet on deck, when I heard a crack behind me, and discovered that Phoca had come to life again. Another snort and a flap showed me that the punt would speedily have the deck rent off if something was not done; so, picking up a rifle with one hand, I sent a bullet through its head, when, luckily for me, the seal died without a struggle.

All this tends to show that, unless with a specially strongly built craft, it is somewhat dangerous to interfere with seals and porpoises, since, if the punter does haul his stunned prey bodily into the punt, it may return the compliment by drowning the puntsman. The obvious precaution is to make perfectly sure that the prey is dead before granting it a free passage.

When a punt is likely to be used for "crowding" to birds over flats, she should be built with a square stern and two

hand-holes, which will come very handy when occasion requires. When she is used a good deal over ice she should have skates affixed to her bottom.

Punt skates are simply two pieces of oak about an inch and a half wide and three or four inches deep, screwed on to the bottom of the punt, lengthwise of course, one on each side, and about six feet long or more, and cut so at top as to follow the spring of the craft. When hard weather sets in, these skates are put on, and the puntsman, if alone—or his man, if he is punting double-handed—should wear ice soles, which I will now describe. These ice soles are simply stout leather sandals, fitted with sharp spikes. The sandals are laced or buckled over the sea boots, precisely in the same manner as my mud pattens are used. With these on, the man has a firm grip, and can proceed very rapidly and noiselessly, lying down and forcing the punt ahead; whilst the gunner in the punt is sighting or otherwise attending to the gun and the birds' motions. Of course, if a man is working single-handed, he cannot possibly get out of the punt, shove the punt to the fowl, get in again, and fire. He would have to show himself in all these evolutions, and therefore would not have the shadow of a chance unless he could shove along the punt beneath the shelter of a bank and bring her up gently at the point to bear upon the fowl, when the punt being still partly behind the bank, he could manage the trick; but these are rare occurrences for fowl. They do, however, happen now and then, but more especially on shore birds—curlews and oyster-catchers particularly being pretty often taken in by that trick as they are feeding at low tide along the shores of a creek. Generally speaking, for fowl, it would be absolutely impossible to try anything of the sort, and the only plan then is to fasten a long string to the gun trigger and tie the end of the string astern to the chock ring. The reasons for tying the string are clear; were the end loose, it might be blown by the wind over the side of the punt, or on its floor, out of the reach of the puntsman, who would then find himself in the impossibility of firing at once. The evil would not be without a remedy, but the remedy would have to be very carefully resorted to, and would

of course entail a loss of time—a great consideration this in most cases.

Thus, the very case in point occurred to me in 1870. The stern chock ring had been torn off previously by the blundering of a man who had got a horse to pull the punt up on the “hard,” instead of doing it himself. I never perceived it until I had occasion to use the long string, when I found that I had nothing to tie it to. I, however, shoved the punt on, trusting to keep the string handy, but when within range I found it gone against the port side, and lying on the bottom boards. I gently turned the punt, crawled in to port, picked up the string, brought it astern, turned the punt again to fire, but the fowl had been uneasy, and they went, to my consternation, before I could be on them. It was, however, under the circumstances, the only thing I could have done. A long string hanging over the stern and dragging behind is to be avoided, because the puntsman would indubitably tread on it with his knees, and thus fire off the gun when not needed.

Now, all this is avoided by tying the string to the chock ring or hole. Of course, only “set” shots can be fired in that case, since the gun is quite beyond the man’s control—barring its trigger string. “Cigarette’s” plan, described at page 82, is therefore greatly preferable.

It should also be remembered that, when firing a gun in the position above alluded to, it will be well to place the left hand on the stern of the punt whilst hitting or pulling the string with the right, and the puntsman should be on his knees. All this being duly attended to, if the punt is light, the ice very slippery, and the gun a heavily loaded one, it will be found that the recoil of the punt will be eased by the bent left arm, and if the puntsman’s body is shoved backwards, as his knees offer no resistance, no harm is done.

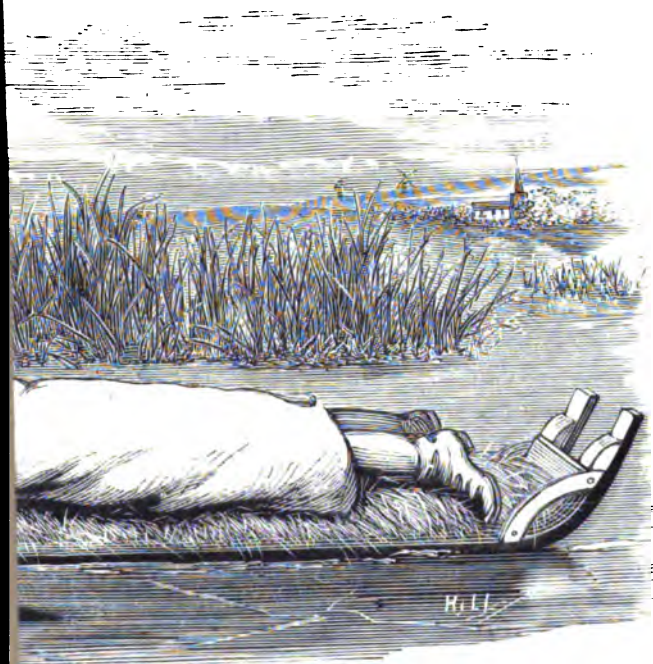
Now, skates should only be resorted to when absolutely required, because a punt, when afloat with her skates on, rows badly, paddles worse, and sculls wretchedly, if any turning has to be performed. And it stands to reason that it must be so, the oak skates causing her to hold a straight course

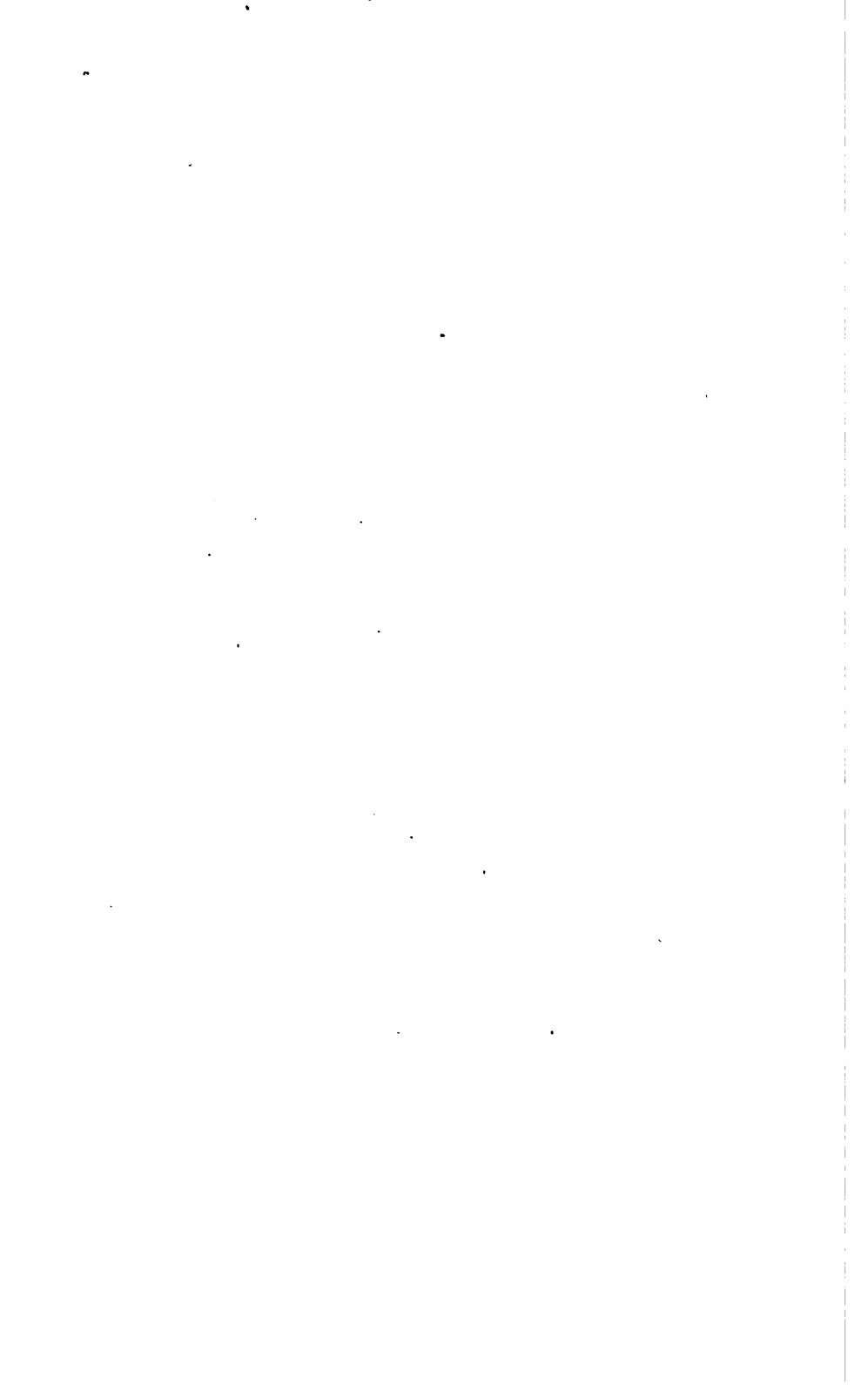
more steadfastly; hence, when under sail with the skates on, she will not make nearly the leeway she will when without. In short, to a small extent the skates act upon her precisely like a keel. Hence the advisability of having the skates as thin as possible, if they are to be kept on the punt when afloat for rowing, paddling, or sculling. The best plan, however, is to remove them when not required, and plug up the holes for their screws when they are taken off.

For work on ice, it is obvious that skates offer very great advantages. First, the punt can be pushed along with a comparative ease which would be lacking were she to travel on her bare bottom. Secondly, it saves the bottom planking considerably, since the brunt of the friction and rubbing on stones, sand, pieces of ice, &c., is borne by the skates, which, when worn out, can be replaced at a trifling cost; whereas, should the bottom itself of the punt get damaged, the consequences would be dangerous to the punter in case of a thaw, and when afloat; and the damage done could not be repaired at such a trifling outlay as skates can be purchased.

Using punts with skates when fowling on ice is therefore a very wise plan to pursue. Our ancestors had very much harder winters than we have, somehow—worse luck! for they had a special ice sledge in constant requisition for fowling in winter time. I have in my possession an old print which I bought years ago in a print shop in the Strand, in which a most faithful delineation of a fowling sledge is given; and I will now proceed to describe it, with the print before my eyes. The sledge, to all appearance, was perfectly flat, and was worked without skates, which, however, would have greatly lightened the labour of the fowler, by causing a considerable diminution in the friction of the apparatus. Indeed, when snow was lying thick on the ice, it must have been no easy matter to shove along such a flat-bottomed concern, since the snow, finding no outlet underneath the sledge, must have accumulated in front of the sledge, and thus impeded its progress and increased the shooter's exertions.

Howbeit, from what I see, I judge that the sledge must have been about eight feet long. It was simply a narrow





plank, with no sides, and just large enough for a man to lie on; and in the stem was fitted a stout wooden knee, rising in a curve from the bottom, forward; in this knee the pin of the swivel gun worked without any spiral spring or rope breeching whatsoever. The gun was evidently well balanced on its pin, which was bodily forged on its barrel. I need not add, *en passant*, that the gun represented in my print is on the flint system.

Well, now, the shooter has covered the bottom of the sledge with straw, and is lying down on his stomach. His head is raised, and he is evidently taking aim; his right hand is on the butt of the gun, sighting it, and the left hand, armed with a short steel prong fitted into a wooden handle, is turning the sledge by thrusting the prong into the ice. That the prong is fitted with a wooden handle I can only conjecture, but that I do pretty rightly I think, as the bare metal would indubitably be anything but pleasant to handle when the frost is so severe as to warrant the use of a sledge. Of course, I take it that the sledge was disguised in front, and probably at the sides, by means of bunches of reeds, &c., artistically disposed, so as to mask the gunner, his artillery, and his sledge to some extent.

Now, to anyone at all acquainted with the habits of wild-fowl, it will be apparent that such a mode of overreaching the birds must have been exceedingly deadly. Creeping along among the reed beds of the fens, &c., and so low on the ice that he could hardly be discerned from his surroundings, the gunner must have had a lively time of it among the flocks. Armed in each hand with an ice prong, steadily, hand over hand, the gunner worked his craft, and, just when the fowl considered themselves most safe, he thundered his heavy load among their serried ranks.

There are still, in various places, such sledges used by gunners; but our winters are now, as a rule, so mild, comparatively speaking, that it is only at rare intervals that the weather is sufficiently hard to render the ice perfectly secure for such a style of pursuit. It is obvious that, unless the ice is of great thickness and long standing, the whole proceeding



would be most unsafe ; for, in the event of the ice giving way, the gun would certainly drag the sledge to the bottom, unless released, and, even if this were done, the bare sledge would prove but a sorry means of taking the shooter ashore in safety. In short, it might perhaps be clung to by him for a while, and that is all—*ergo*, sledges should not be resorted to unless the ice is strong and firm, and not likely anywhere to be rotten or weak. Should this be the case, a light punt on her skates would be immensely safer ; for, should the ice look threatening, or begin cracking, the shooter, in a jiffy, can get in the punt, and, for the time being, at any rate, defy danger. That is on inland waters, lakes, broads, &c. On tidal estuaries the thing is quite different ; when ice is about there it is in more or less large icebergs, and it is most unsafe then to venture out at all in a punt, except at suitable times—for, should the punt be caught between heavy floes, then the fate of the punter is sealed. Besides this, drifting ice, knocked about at speed by the tide when rushing down, is most dangerous. It may stove or capsize the punt, and the greatest caution should therefore be used. At the same time, as the fowl are a hundredfold more numerous than in open weather, and also far more easily overreached, a plucky man will not hesitate, but he must join caution to daring ; and, from his experience of the estuary and his knowledge of the tides, he should set out when he knows that he would have a chance of doing some good without rushing blindfold into danger. Danger he will certainly meet ; but, with care, he may avoid its consequences, and certainly his exertions will be very amply repaid by the harvest he will be sure to reap. By the way, it should not be forgotten that, when many icebergs are about, the fowl are often temporarily installed on some of these, and in that position, if the floating icebergs are at all thick, the fowl are beyond the reach of the punt gun. Consequently a heavy shoulder gun should always be carried by the punter on such occasions, and he will find that such a shoulder gun will have quite as many (if not more) occasions “to speak” as the punt gun, and one of the reasons wherefor I have made clear. Another reason is that very many birds

of all kinds are about then, continually on the wing, and small bunches of teal and companies of ducks or widgeons, besides single birds, frequently pass within quite short range of the gunner, who then can, if he choose, display his skill as a flying marksman. Generally speaking, however, only amateurs resort to that expedient for sport; whereas the men who shoot for a living prefer drifting to a flock, or lying in ambush for drifting birds, and letting them have it wholesale from their big guns. I, for one, greatly prefer picking up flying shots, because there is then a great deal of sport to be had in that line; and I would prefer having fifty shots in a day with a 4-bore for instance, bagging, say, a score or so of birds, and enjoy myself all day with the incidents of the various "shots," and the occasional cripple chase, rather than wait for a heavy shot, kill a score of birds at one shot, and then go home. But I will refer to this again by-and-by. I want now to give sundry measurements of punts and their build.

Mr. Folkard gives the following dimensions for a punt to carry a gun firing half a pound or so of shot, with a man of ten or eleven stone weight: Length, 17ft.; breadth amidships, 2ft. 10in.; ditto ditto at bottom, 2ft. 8in.; depth at bows, 4in.; ditto at stern, 8in. This punt should be built with a spring in her bottom, fore and aft, of from 1½in. to 2in. This is to make her handy over the shallows when, though she may touch bottom, she may yet be forced ahead for some distance: whereas a craft without any spring would certainly stick.

Mr. Folkard explains that such a punt may be built either flat-bottomed, with sides at an angle, or flat-floored—i.e., like the bottom of a skiff, with round sides like a whale boat—keeping, however, the floor throughout as flat as it consistently can be; and he adds that this is by far the best form of punt.

Now, as far as my experience goes, I do not quite agree in this, because, unless these boats have plenty of beam, they are not steady enough, and anyone who has used them impartially will, I believe, agree with me. They row well and paddle easily, but they scull poorly, and roll a great deal more than is

convenient where perfect stability, as far as can be had, is desirable. Col. Hawker says they have unsteady bearings, and he is right. You can hardly move in them, in fact, but what, unless built with an extreme beam, you topple over and upset them. That is, of course, only my experience of those round-sided punts I have tried. There may be better ones, more steady, and all that can be wished ; but it never was my luck to be in such an one. At the same time there may be such. Still, a punt 17ft. long, with only 2ft. 8in. beam at bottom, and with a round bottom and sides, would be to my mind a capsizing machine, unless used with extreme caution ; and I observe that Mr. Folkard admits that it is a great desideratum to maintain the floor throughout as flat as it consistently can be. I quite agree with that.

And now as to measurements. I have roughly measured several punts myself at Poole, and at Mersea and Heybridge Basin, on the Blackwater. One of the Poole punts was carrying a gun firing 12oz. of shot, and a man weighing, as near as I could judge, 11 stone. Her dimensions were : Length, 15ft. ; breadth amidships, 2ft. 10in. ; breadth amidships at bottom, 2ft. 8in. ; depth at bows, 4in. ; depth at stern, 7in., with the usual spring of 1½in. to 2in. She was flat-bottomed, and a pretty model of a punt too, as handy as could be.

The gun was worked with a wooden rest, and its recoil was taken up by a rope breeching. Another flat-bottomed single-handed Poole punt measured as follows : Length, 14ft. ; breadth at gunwale, 2ft. 8in. ; breadth at bottom, 2ft. 6in. ; depth at bows, 4in. ; depth at stern, 8in.

These two punts were "paddled" to birds. Here are now the measurements of one that was "sculled," viz. : Length, 18ft. ; breadth at gunwale, 3ft. ; breadth at bottom, 2ft. 10in. ; depth at bows, 6in. ; depth at stern, 9in.

This last punt was decked all round, and had fixed bulwarks. She was nearly the very counterpart of Sam Slinger's punt, as described by Col. Hawker and illustrated in his work, and a first-rate sea punt she was too.

Sam Slinger's punt measured : Length, 18½ft. ; breadth at gunwale, 3ft. ; breadth at bottom, 2ft. 8in. The heights at

bows and at stern are not given, but I take it that they were not very much different from those given above. For a figure of this punt I must refer my readers to Col. Hawker's work, where, if anything, she is shown with a bit more beam than she ought to have been, but otherwise very fairly drawn. In the illustration it will be observed that Harry Troth, the fowler who is shown in the act of sculling to geese, has the gun mounted on a very high crutch forward, which is as it should be. For swans, the crutch should be still higher.

For double-handed punts, I beg to give the dimensions of two specimens in which I have myself punted. No. 1: Length over decks, 21ft.; length of bottom, 20ft.; breadth at gunwale, 3ft. 6in.; breadth at bottom, 3ft.; height at bows, 6in.; height at stern, 10in.; spring forward, 1½in.; spring astern, 1in.; kammel, 1in. No. 2: Length over decks, 21ft. 6in.; length of bottom, 20ft. 6in.; breadth at gunwale, 3ft. 8in.; breadth at bottom, 3ft. 2in.; height at bows, 7in.; height at stern, 11in.; spring forward, 2in.; spring astern, 1½in.; kammel, 1in. The kammel, of course, gives life to the punt which otherwise would be "dull" to work.

One of these punts was built as follows: Timbers and floor made of hoop ash, planking of elm, and decks of Norway deal; she was coppered from stem to stern up to the deck. The other punt was built of ash, deal, and oak, *i.e.*, ½in. oak bottom plank, ¾in. oak sides, ash timbers, and cross pieces of oak; the scantling was deal, of course. This punt was not coppered, except at stem, and for a few feet along the water-mark down the sides.

I give these measurements merely as to my own experience; but it should be remembered that almost all the punts now afloat differ in some respect from each other, and so on. Every man has his own views on the subject, and builds his craft accordingly. I, therefore, do not wish these measurements to be taken as strictly to be followed. I only mention them as guides to beginners, and have no wish to run contrary to any other views of experienced men. I repeat it—there are hardly two punts alike in this world, therefore there are no

acknowledged and absolutely recognised measurements. All I am therefore now doing is simply giving the measurements of some punts which I and others have found handy, comfortable, and seaworthy boats. I have no doubt there are hundreds of equally handy, comfortable, and seaworthy punts; but I can only speak personally of those I have been in, of course. Therefore, if any of my readers should wish to give their own views on the subject, those views will be most welcome. It is usual for some professionals to scoff at and abuse any other model of punt but their own. That is a silly proceeding, which enlightens nobody, and I, for one, like to be enlightened.

Now I will proceed to give several measurements of double-handed punts, as stated in Col. Hawker's work, by which it will be seen that his punts differed but slightly from the two I have described, and which had evidently been built from his models, with slight variations, according to the requirements of the gunner.

No. 1. Double-handed punt on Col. Hawker's measurements, for a stanchion gun to be used without a swivel, and with a rope breeching: Length from stem to stern, 21ft. 4in.; ditto at bottom, 20ft. 6in.; width at gunwale, 3ft. 8in.; ditto at bottom, 3ft.; spring, fore and aft, 1½in.; kammel, 1in.; height at bow, 6in.; ditto, stern, 11in.; height of bulwarks, forward, 4in.; ditto, aft, declining gradually to 2in.; gradual rise of decks to bulwarks, 2in.; bottom, ½in. plank; sides, ¾in.; all to be made of oak, except decks of withy or Norway deal.

In the cut which accompanies the above figures in the Colonel's book, a trap-hatch is shown unshipped, aft, for "sculling" or "setting." Of course for "paddling," two removable trap-hatches should be provided, nearly amidships.

No. 2. Double-handed punt, built to carry Col. Hawker's double-stanchion gun, weight 200lb.: Length from stem to stern, 22ft. 7in.; ditto at bottom, 21ft. 10in.; width at gunwale, 4ft. 9in.; ditto at bottom, 4ft. (In order to obtain this "flamming," the plank amidships should be as much as 8in. in breadth.) Spring, fore and aft, 3in.; kammel, 1½in.; height at bow, 4½in.; ditto, astern, 10in.; bulwarks, forward,

4in.; ditto, aft, gradually declining to 2in.; gradual rise of decks to bulwarks, 2in.; bottom plank made of elm, where gun is fixed, 1½in. thick; elm sides; decks of withy or Norway deal.

In another punt previously built by the gallant Colonel, to carry the same gun, the length was nearly 2ft. less than the above, and the breadth amidships was 5ft., and at bottom, 4ft. 6in. The gradual rise of deck was the same, and the planks for sides were to be—at stern, 11in.; amidships, 7in.; and at bow, 5in.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### PUNTS—(*Continued.*)

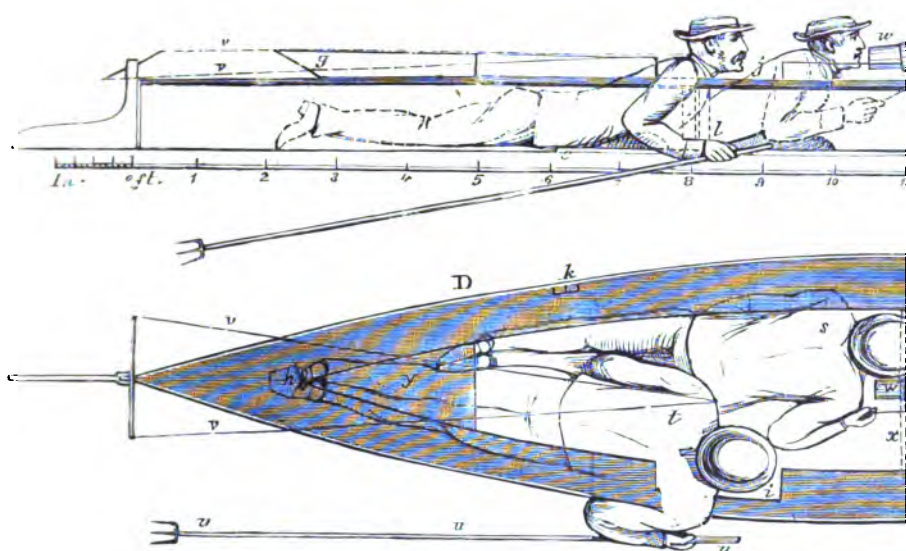
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WHILST the discussion on punts was going on in the *Field*, a correspondent wrote as follows :

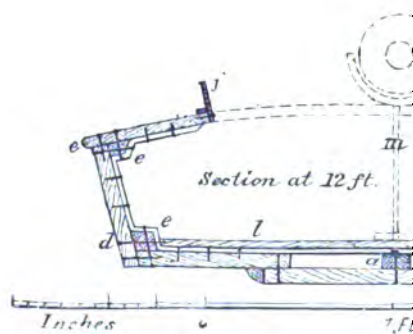
As the form and dimensions of gunning punts are under discussion in the *Field*, it may be of service if you give a drawing of one of the punts I am in the habit of using in Holland. Before describing her, I should like to say a few words on dimensions, as some little confusion appears to exist as to the difference between a short and broad punt and a long and narrow punt. "Short and broad," and "long and narrow," are only relative terms ; and if a man says that a punt is short and broad, he does not necessarily mean that her breadth is actually greater than is the breadth of a punt which he describes as "long and narrow." For instance, the punt described at page 123, by Mr. Pike, is 17ft. long and 3ft. 3in. broad, whereas my punt is 23ft. long and 3ft. 3in. broad ; his relatively to mine is short and broad, but the greatest breadths of the two are identical. Of course, by adding 6ft. to the length of a punt (the main breadth remaining the same) one gets a very much more powerful vessel ; one that is better in a sloppy sea, and one that can be shoved on a "bee line" without much using the rudder.

My punt is 22ft. 3in. long, and 3ft. 3in. broad, the greatest beam being 12ft. from the stem. The height at the stem and stern is 8½in., and at the midships 9½in. She is built of 1in. yellow pine ; the bottom is composed of three pieces, as shown by Fig. A. The centre piece being fitted below the side pieces, a well is formed (see *a*), which is quite sufficient to hold any slight leakage the punt may make, or a slop of a sea that may come in. For baling I find a sponge answers best. The centre piece is fastened to the side pieces by copper nails rooved and clenched. The sides of the punt are screwed to the bottom, as shown, and increase in depth near the bow and stern (see *c c*, Fig. B), where the centre piece of the bottom begins to take the whole breadth of the punt.

In the angle formed by the sides and bottom and under the water ways (see *d d* and *e e*, Fig. A), two fillets of fir are worked ; at equal distances

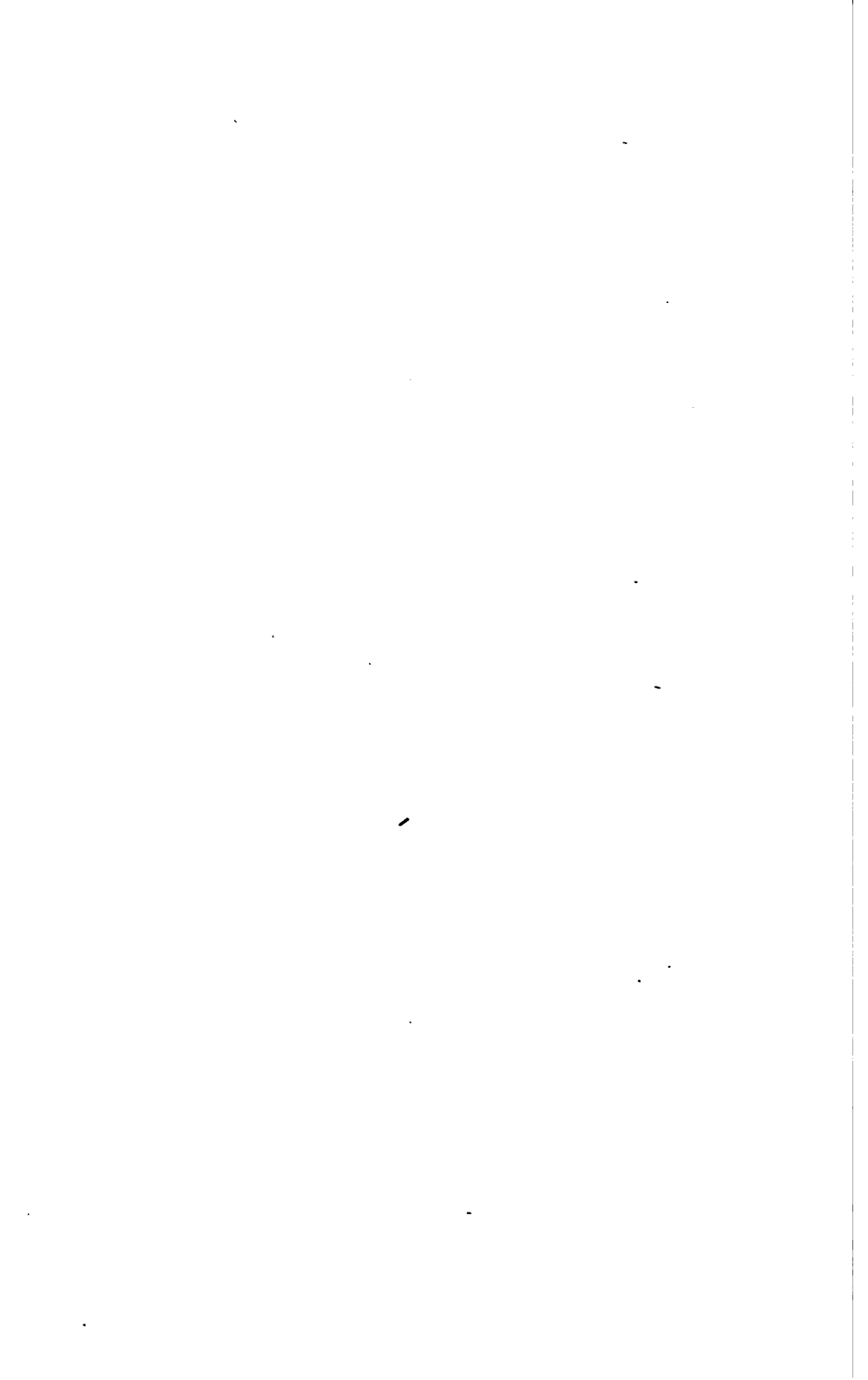


SIDE VIEW AND PLAN OF



MIDSHIP SECTION OF





of 2ft. over the middle length eight bar-iron (1in. by  $\frac{1}{2}$ in.) straps are worked from the waterways, down the sides and across the bottom (see *e*, Fig. A.), and fastened as shown. The bottom boards, of  $\frac{1}{2}$ in. deal, are shown by *i i*. The coamings flare out a little (see *f*, Fig. A), and the two after ends (see *g*, Fig. B) are hinged so as to drop down when shoving; otherwise, should the wind be abeam, the head, when shoving up to birds, will be continually coming up in the wind. As it is necessary, when no one is on board, to tow stern first, on account of the weight of the gun bringing her by the head, the coamings at the stern end are made a little higher, so as to keep the water out should there be any sea on. The extreme ends of the coaming (*g*) have two small holes, through which small pieces of cord are rove to tie them together (see *h*, Fig. D); and this I find to answer the best after trying all sorts of ingenious bolts and apses. A part of the waterway is cut away at *i* (see Fig. D), and of the coaming at *j* (see Fig. B), on the starboard side, to give greater power and freedom to the arms and shoulder when shoving. These openings are edged with brass plates below and above, so as to form a groove into which thin pieces of wood, the shape of the opening, are fixed when not shoving. The rowlocks are at *k k* (see B and D), and consist of a chock of wood fitted inside, as shown by *l* (Fig. B). Ordinary crutches of suitable length are shipped in the rowlock when rowing.

The stanchion or crutch for the gun is fitted at *m*, as shown, and is nearly balanced, but a little the greater weight is required forward of the stanchion, as the gun can then be more easily worked. I find, if there is any swell or lop on, that the gun can be kept much steadier whilst aiming if it is not accurately balanced; of course, so much of the weight must not be forward of the stanchion as to require any extraordinary exertion to keep the muzzle off the deck of the punt, but it should be supported by the stanchion, so that a firm grip is necessary to get it into position. In my case it would take three or four pounds on the stock of the gun to balance it. The breeching of the gun consists of 3in. bolt rope rove through the stem at *n*, and passing up over the deck to the eye on the gun. The manner of shackling the breeching to the gun is shown by Fig. E. Two iron thimble-eyes are always kept on the shackle, and the rope is stopped back over these by a simple seizing; *p* is the screw bolt or pin of the shackle.

For loading I have a copper tube (see F) about a foot long, which contains the charge of powder (I usually go out with three of these ready filled); if it is calm, and if there is no convenient place to land, I go out on the fore deck, depress the muzzle of the gun, and then insert the tube (having previously, of course, taken off the cap of the tube). The rod (*g*) is hooked to the tube, and when I have pushed it back into the chamber the muzzle is elevated, and the powder is thus shot out of the tube in a perfectly dry state. The wire cartridge containing the shot is then rammed home. When priming, the gun must be unshackled, and turned over on its side so as to bring the priming chamber (*r*) uppermost (see *r*, Figs. A, B, and D). At *r* is a screw plug (which is readily unscrewed), the powder

poured in, and the plug screwed in again. There are two nipples, and on these ordinary service caps are put, the hammer exploding both simultaneously. I have never had a missfire, and the loading can be done very rapidly.

I prefer a muzzle-loader to a breechloader. The advantages of the former are—(1) they are less likely to get out of order; (2) as powder and shot are to be got everywhere, you are not likely to fall short of ammunition; whereas with a breechloader, if you are short of cartridges you are done; and (3) they are far cheaper. As far as I have ever seen, breechloaders have but two advantages. The first is, that should a cartridge be put in, and a shot not be got, the gun can immediately be unloaded; secondly, should a cartridge loaded with widgeon shot be put in (I am taking for granted the gun is not loaded before a flock of birds are seen), and when nearly up to the birds, instead of widgeon they are found to be geese, I can imagine it just possible to shift the cartridge for one loaded with larger shot; but, as this is not likely to occur to anyone who knows anything about wildfowl shooting, I think the advantage very small, and the former one not much greater.

Another reason why I should like to see muzzle-loaders generally used for punt shooting is, that a beginner who uses one is less likely to be slamming it off on every possible occasion, often without the least chance of getting any birds, but always with the certainty of making them more wild and shy. Of course anyone who really loves the sport, and follows it systematically, would not be more likely to outrage the feelings of other sportsmen by firing at the "incorporal air," whether he had a breechloader or muzzle-loader; but I think the little extra trouble of loading a muzzle-loader would make the tyro think twice before firing a random shot.

The gunner stows himself out of sight at full length, as shown by *s*, Fig. D. The punter takes up a berth in the stern, as at *t*, and shoves with his right hand (*u*). In his left hand he holds the yoke lines (*v v*), which pass over (one on each side) his shoulders. The positions of the figures in the punt are scarcely accurate representations of the positions which would be assumed in practice, but they will serve to roughly show how two persons work in a punt.

In handling the gun, care should be taken to keep the hand on top of the wooden plug *w*; but, above all things, not to allow the thumb to be over-lapping its end. Having fired the gun, the breech is depressed, and a bar of wood (see *z*, Fig. D) fixed over it, the two ends going under the waterways. This keeps the muzzle of the gun out of the reach of salt water whilst rowing after the birds. For rowing the punter sits on the stern (see *y*, Fig. D), and pushes the port oar; the gunner is on the bottom boards facing the other, and pulls the starboard oar.

PUNT.

Mr. Harmer also kindly sent me the measurements and the accompanying sketch of his single-handed gunning punt. She is suitable for a 12-stone man and an 80lb. gun, and I would

most highly recommend her to any sportsman intending to have a punt built for next season. Her dimensions are as follows: Length over all, 16ft. 10½in.; length of bottom, 16ft.; width of bottom, 2ft. 10in.; flare of sides, 4½in.; rake of stem, 5½in.; rake of stern, 5in.; spring fore and aft, 2in.; kammel, 1in.; middle plank of bottom, 1in. oak; side pieces of bottom, ¾in. oak; sides, pricked, ¼in., and planed (one flick to a side); bottom and sides well floored and timbered; copper fastened; no iron about her except knees and fixings for the gun; sculling crutch and rowlocks; decks, bottom boards, &c., white pine. White pine means yellow pine, white deal, in the trade—all carpenters would know that. Spruce would not do on any terms, it being most unsuitable.

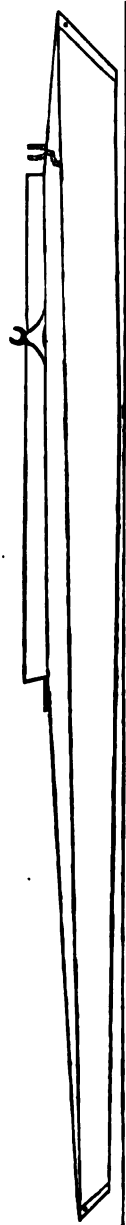
Mr. Harmer always designs his own punts himself, and gets the boat builders to work under his direction and supervision. That is the best plan to pursue when one lives on the spot.

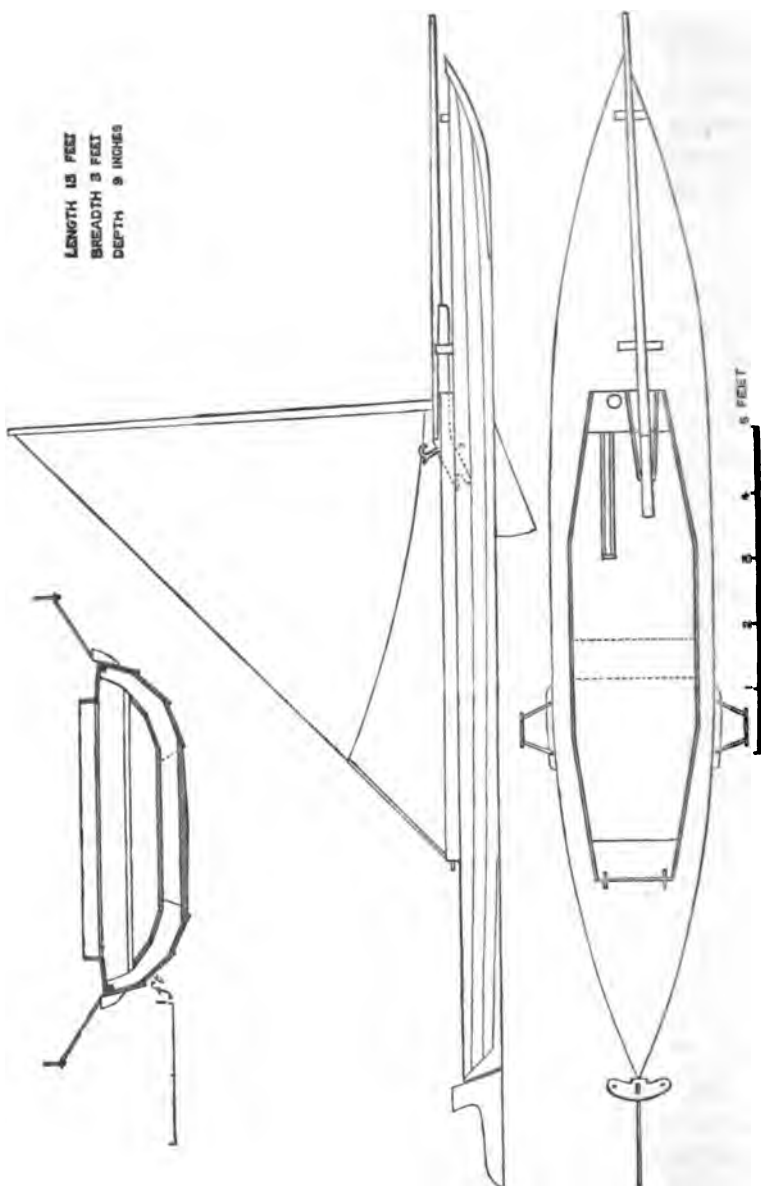
Mr. Harmer also writes that he has a great dislike to fir boats, for many reasons; but, particularly when amongst ice, and this quite agrees with my own views as expressed before. And he goes on to say:

Therefore I always build with 'oak, and,' no matter whether amongst young 'ice' or thick floes, &c., I have no fear of cutting my punt, and, with ice 'hook' aboard, I go fearlessly amongst it as far as that is concerned. The best colour for a punt, taken all round, is that of a kittiwake's back; of this I am quite certain. Take notice of a lot of kittys singly and otherwise, at different distances, and I think you will come to the same conclusion.

The notion is certainly a good one; for, unless the kittys get on the wing, one does not see them until upon them, so to speak.

Another wildfowl shooter then wrote as follows:

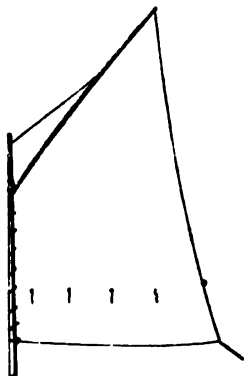




Taking, as I do, a great interest in all that appertains to wildfowl shooting, I inclose a sketch of an 18ft. gunning punt, which may possibly be of use in your discussion on the subject. This punt will float in very little water, and will sail and scull pretty well. When the punter is lying down he steers with his feet, having a tiller between the feet; at such times the riggers are unshipped. A stool can be used in place of an unshipping thwart for rowing on, but I prefer the latter. The sail is bent to the mast, thus reducing the gear to a minimum, and when rolled round the mast stows away in the least possible space. G. S. G.

And in reply to a query, G. S. G. wrote me that this centre-board punt can sail anywhere with two inches or more of water, for her board can be raised or put down an inch at a time. This is, doubtless, a very convenient arrangement. G. S. G. also states that his sail is a leg o' mutton sail, which, he adds, he thinks is the only sort of sail fit for that sort of craft.

As will be perceived, the gun is fixed a bit to starboard, and the centre-board a bit to port, the mast hole being just between. The punt measures 18ft. length, 3ft. beam, and 9in. depth; she is clinker-built, one plank for bottom, three for each side; depth of centre-board, about 8in. Such a punt ought to do well. G. S. G. tells me that she will scull and sail pretty well. He would find that if he added a keel of 3in. to nothing she would do wonderfully well under sail. I also endorse his advocacy of rowing on an unshipped thwart instead of providing a stool, because the less things one has to provide and think of the better.



As to sails, Mr. Harmer sent me the above sketch of his mast and sail for his single-handed punt.

And he explained :

The jaws of the gaff are a ring, with joint to the spar, which goes into the gaff, so that on letting go the peak halyards you can lift out mast and sail altogether ; the gaff will be parallel to the mast, and all put under the fore-deck in no time. When wanting to set sail, nothing to do but pull out from under fore-deck, step the mast, up peak (main is always kept taut up), reeve sheet, and you are under way. I ship my mast starboard side of gun, near the knee, *inside* wash streaks. I do *not* approve of having mast holes through decks, and having to plug up the same. My sail is of grey cotton for single-handed punt ; its size is that which I can carry with a strong wind. My double-handed punt's sail is a lug, tack to the mast, and for long passages, up rivers, &c., I use a boom, not otherwise. The material of sail is the lightest duck ; I find a dip in tan prevents mildew.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### PUNTS—(*Continued.*)

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MR. J. M. PIKE, of Malvern, was also kind enough to contribute his quota to the correspondence on the subject. He first wrote :

I see a good deal in the *Field* on the subject of sailing punts, as being a different thing entirely to the ordinary punt as used for wildfowling. We never see such a thing about Poole as a sailing punt *per se*. Birds are often shot under canvas ; but that is from the ordinary punt, which will sail about on a beam wind. The sailing punt described by "Folkard" has a sail, and of course is almost useless for setting in over mud flats with the rising tide. It must be used, as it were, for a sport by itself, *i.e.*, on a day with just the amount of wind requisite. It seems to me that the centre-board applied to the ordinary gunning punt is a much better device, and, though I cannot say from actual experience what such a craft as that referred to as a sailing punt will do as regards going to windward, yet I expect my gunning punt with its centre-board would lead it pretty considerably in a turn to windward, especially if there happened to be a nice breeze blowing at the time. Still it may be urged that that is not what is required, but only to run in on the birds at such an angle as to insure their not winding you. But my boat will do that as well, and is equally ready for setting in over flats or anything else that may be required ; while, from the description of the regular sailing punt, I should think to be caught any distance from the shore in a breeze would be the reverse of pleasant. Often, too, when out after birds, there comes a long stretch of water where it is known by long experience there will not be anything, and one might as well sail as exhaust oneself by rowing ; but the wind is a little shy, and before any distance is reached the punt is on the lee edge of the channel, and out wooden topsails is the order of the day again. Not so with the centre-board—shove it down, and up comes the punt's nose to the wind, and, with very little to leeward, she goes on her course rejoicing, saving many a weary mile of useless fatigue.

In fact, I know of scarcely anything that affords more satisfaction than



that small piece of galvanised iron which does duty in my punt, and to find myself at a distance from home without it is a calamity I am pretty careful to avoid, having once experienced its merits.

Of course, the ordinary objection to a centre-board is where to put it. Don't it take up all the room in the punt? How do you work your gun? My reply is, that a man might be in the punt a long time without even knowing that it was there at all. The proper place for the centre-board case in a gunning punt is just forward of the main beam. This may, of course, strike people as too far forward; but it answers capitally. Don't have any fixed board, but a piece of galvanised iron; you can keep this in the bottom of your punt, ready to slip in when required. The case itself demands a few words: Don't have it long—15in. or 18in. is plenty; the forward part of the board makes the boat gripe too much, and the nearer the gunning beam—i.e., the further aft—the better your boat will perform. The case should be 1½in. solid board, with a groove cut through it; thus there is no danger of any leakage. It is best put in, of course, when the punt is being built. Have the deck screwed down on top of it, and let your piece of board go from the gunning beam to the next one forward, the deck to be screwed down on to it; of course, a narrow slit must also be cut through the deck boards. The whole then forms a most solid and strengthening help to the punt generally; and, as I have said, a man might use the punt without even knowing it was there.

It is really wonderful the difference made by this contrivance. Put it down—mine, I think, goes about thirteen inches beneath the punt's bottom—fasten your main sheet through the hole for your stern line, and you have a regular little *Una* boat, no sheets or anything to attend to. The punt, if properly shaped, will stay with one snap of the oar, and you can sit down if so disposed, and, especially with a suspicion of a weather tide, get many a long reach to windward, which otherwise would have cost many a stroke of the paddle.

The shape of your punt, of course, determines your general comfort, and more especially under sail—a narrow, wall-sided one, with flat decks, being, in my opinion, the thing to avoid. Mere dimensions do not give a novice any idea of a punt, and telling him eighteen feet by three might put him in possession of anything from one of the upright coffin-shaped things alluded to, to a gracefully shaped punt, with its beautifully rounded deck, flaring sides, general “all on the rounding” appearance, peculiar to the cigar-shaped steam yachts that infest Southampton Water, or, more appropriate still, one of her Majesty's new torpedo launches. I think they must have been planned by some one conversant with a well-shaped gunning punt. Shall I send you a small model of a punt, which will do more to give a correct idea of what a punt should possess, skilfully designed with reference to the sport of wildfowling and its various demands, those demands essentially modifying one another, than a good many columns of print.

To this I replied that Mr. Pike's plan of centre-board was capital. I should have thought that his punt would not have

sailed well having the centre-board forward of the main beam ; but since he says that it answers, of course it is all right. I should be very pleased to see his model of a punt.

So accordingly, Mr. Pike sent it, and the following cut is a delineation thereof :



Accompanying the model was the following note :—

In accordance with my promise I send you a model of a punt which I designed myself, and had built by a shipwright at Poole. The punt was intended to carry a man of 12st. weight and a gun of 100lb. This sized punt will do for any ordinary gunner and gun ; anything out the way must of course be allowed for. Capt. Stokes, for instance, weighed 18st. and his gun 130lb. My punt would not have done for that, except in very calm weather. At Poole the channels are often dangerous, owing to strong tides, which render seaworthy boats a desideratum. The dimensions of the punt are as follows : Length, 17ft. ; breadth at bottom, 2ft. 4in. ; ditto on top, 3ft. 3in. ; height at bow, 6in. ; ditto at stern, 6in. ; ditto amidships, 6in. ; round of beam, 6in. ; distance of gunning, 7ft. 6in. ; beam from bows—camber fore and aft, 2in. ; round amidships, ½in. These are the full dimensions, but a novice might order a boat exactly to fulfil these without any more resembling the inclosed model than a 20-ton smack does the *Vanessa*. Herein lies the necessity for an experienced builder, one who has made other punts before. Every one he builds adds to the man's knowledge of how to do better next time. This punt is fastened throughout with brass screws, and I think they are as good a means as any. One of her peculiarities are her two ends ; they are of the same height. Some punts are built about four inches high forward, running to a foot or so aft. They look very ugly, are always running their noses under water in any lop, and have no earthly advantage, except that they are supposed to show less end on. Mine is almost invisible end on and broadside. The low side, with the rapidly rounding deck, shows far less than in the other style of punt, while, as regards seaworthiness, the water is no sooner on the deck than it is off again, moderately high combings keeping the punt quite dry. The side is worked on a straight line, as it were, of six inches, bow and stern being exactly that height, the sides are put on with the proper "flare ;" this of course alters at different lengths in the punt, and are then cut down to give the uniform height of six inches throughout—i.e., perpendicular ; this of course gives the plank a different width throughout, and the amateur is very liable to be deceived, and get his side too low, if not very careful. A curious lifting hollow bow is produced, which helps the punt in a sea, and the curve of the plank at this point requires to be allowed for ; the general view of the punt is very unique, much like a cigar,

tapered off at the ends, and, with the big gun in the bows, presents a singularly formidable appearance. It is as nearly invisible as possible; the flaring sides and rounding decks seem to harmonise with the surface of the water, and blend up with it in a way that renders the outline of the punt even broadside on, as it were a mere line upon the water, apparently level with it. In reality, when inside, you are astonished at the room and comfort displayed; the bottom is certainly narrow, but the rapid angle at which the sides run off give plenty of room where it is needed, and prevent the punt from drawing much water by the rapidly increasing displacement; while the advantages of the narrow bottom for ease in rowing are fully maintained. I never could see much advantage in a high sternpost for a punt; I always thought it looked ugly, and was not much use. The rapid round up of the deck in my boat gives all the qualities rendered necessary by the weight of the man aft, and certainly looks better.

The position at which a punt ships water first is where the fore deck ends, near the gunning beam. Here, then, the greatest height seems wanted. I don't see much use in a high side here, though, if it can be dispensed with; if the height can be distributed over several dimensions, it acts as a shield against the water, and does not present anything like so formidable an appearance for the fowl to scan when the punt is broadside on to them, as it often must be when working up a narrow creek to some place they have selected amongst the ooze, the windings of the creek rendering such exposure inevitable occasionally. The height in my boat attained by side and round of deck is 6in. by 6in.; over that again we have the wash streaks, another 3in. or 4in. The height in perpendicular would be ridiculous in a punt, but, thus divided, looks nothing. The rapid flare of a boat's sides add wonderfully to its buoyancy in a sea, and thus enable the sides to be lower. There is another advantage; boats thus built are not nearly so liable to be cut with ice. As regards material, I prefer larch for sides, yellow pine for deck and bottom; "withy" for beams, as my builder says, is nice and light. Screw all together with brass screws, then you can take your deck off, and keep painted underneath. *My* punts are always kept varnished inside. I like it best; it is cleaner to my mind than paint, which is apt to clog, and get massed on in lumps about the corners of the timbers, thus adding materially to the weight. The shape of this model forwards gives her great life in a sea way; under sail this can be especially noticed. A straight-sided punt, hard pressed by sail, even without the big gun forward, will go bodily down if there is any length in the sea for her to get her nose under. Not so with my boat; the harder you press her the more her nose goes up. I had a large spritsail fitted to one of my boats built on this plan, 7ft. 6in. the hoist, by 8ft. in the boom. I could get her along faster than the small spritsail yawls with a fair wind; but of course that sort of work would not do for gunning—punt and gun would soon be at the bottom at that rate; but, for summer sailing about the harbour, a punt with large sails and a centre-board is most delightful, with your bass lines, and a small gun for companion.

I see different plans for sails advised—latine, lug, shoulder of mutton,

and sprit. I prefer the old-fashioned sprit, with a small neat goose-neck and boom at the bottom. The latine has a long bothering yard. The lug is next best to the sprit, but with no advantage, rather more troublesome to get well set, and lowering down the yard leaves up a mast, which is a nuisance to row to windward; and I really see no other advantage in the lug beyond that of being able to lower away. The shoulder of mutton has a very long mast, and is soonest set of any, a good sail before the wind, and no good on it. It does very well for running down home with a fair wind, or anything of that sort, and is very well for an amateur to start with. The sprit must be properly shaped, of course. The way I have mine cut is as follows: A long boom well cut up to clear your head, a very short mast, and a long sprit. Thus you can stow your mast without getting up, as it is so short. You get a large spread of sail low down. Your long setting pole does very well for a sprit, and gets rid of an extra spar. You thus get as good a "combination" sail as can be desired. My working one is boom six foot, mast about four, and a very long sprit. "Unbleached" is the best for the sail. A coat of bark or oil may be given; it then becomes a useful waterproof adjunct in case of rain. A boom at the foot will be objected to by many; but I have sailed a great deal in punts, and never have a sail without one—the difference on and off the wind is so manifest. The Poole men often place their setting-pole against the mast, and make it do duty, which answers well enough for a run down wind.

I always set a copper stem band on the end of my boats—it does capitally for ice; and, if you do go foul of anything else, it is just as well to get the best of it if you can.

A properly-built punt of this sort comes rather dear, but it is cheap in the end, as it lasts for years and is light, and a thoroughly good servant throughout, giving satisfaction in all particulars—sailing and rowing very well, very steady with the gun to fire from, this resulting from the flare of the sides; a capital sea boat, from its peculiar build, combined as far as possible with a very small amount of "show" upon the water. These last qualities are contradictory, height of free-board being of course requisite; but this shaped punt will, though very low, possess an enormous amount of vitality in a sea way. I have crossed Poole channel in mine with a strong weather tide running, causing an amount of white water that certainly looked almost too much of it from the snug "lake" amongst the mud flats from which I was emerging. A few hints on going through a job of this sort may be useful. Pull in your big gun off its rest and crutch, and lay it along the bottom of your punt pretty well aft, and on the leeward side, to give a windward side for the seat; fit in your front piece or your end to the wash streaks, and thus prepared your punt will go through double the weather she would with the gun forward. A little shift of your body to leeward when an extra comber appears, will often save you shipping water. There is another adjunct to a punt, which she should never be without, when in use, too, it makes her almost a lifeboat; air compartments would be an awful nuisance, leaving no room to stow away anything, and to row about a lot of useless lumber in the way of corks seems absurd in

a neat little craft like a well got up gunning punt, where every bit of room must be economised, and every pound of weight is a consideration. What I am referring to is an oilskin covering to buckle on over the combings. Little studs with buttonholes through the oilskin form the best way of fastening it. In addition to the other preparations I alluded to for crossing an unavoidable channel on a rough day, have this buckled all along the weather side, and fastened forward on the other side, back as far aft as will permit you a free use of your arms and back in rowing. A little cross-bar to fix across the punt will help to prevent the water accumulating on the top of the oilskin. In this way I have been across places utterly unsafe for any punt not thus assisted. This covering does, too, for many other purposes as well. It acts as a temporary wooden cover to keep your things dry when the punt is left away from her wooden cover; in case of a sudden rain storm you can partly buckle it on, and it will protect you and keep all your gear dry for the time. Being dry and having a dry boat is one of the most important points to be looked after as regards personal comfort. This cover can be of the same material as the sail, done over with oil. It is quite soft, and can be rolled up and stored away in very small compass.

I may add that the sternpost of the punt might be rounded under water to prevent weeds accumulating. I like the look of upright ends best.

"Skolopax" also sent the following most practical contribution, which I insert in its entirety :

After the wide field occupied by "Wildfowler" in discussing the noble and fascinating science of which he seems such an ardent professor, it may appear presumptuous in me to offer any observations upon a subject now so well understood and so extensively ventilated in the columns of the *Field*; but as my mode of building canoes and using the gun differs from most of the "gunners" who have written upon the subject, I gladly comply with the request of some of the writers, that those "gunners" who have hitherto abstained from joining in the discussion would come forward and give the result of their experiences.

It is about forty-five years since I commenced the pursuit after wildfowl, and was induced to do so by the study of Col. Hawker's treatise on shooting, and that of Capt. Lacy, when there were not more than two or three guns round the whole coast of Ireland. The difficulties experienced by my first essays were similar to those already described by young hands; and, as in the course of time they were gradually overcome, I beg to give young gunners the result of my experience, and to describe my *modus operandi*, both as to building a canoe and the use of the gun.

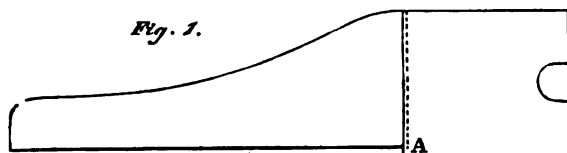
One of my first canoes was built on the model of Col. Hawker's, whose whole concern I was kindly allowed to inspect at Keyhaven; but I soon found that it was too heavy and too large in every way, and, though we managed to do some business in it, I discarded it, and built another on the

Wexford model, which was far better. Without further delay, then, I will proceed to show the modern gunner my mode of building a canoe, in order that any amateur may be enabled to build his own craft, with the assistance of any handy carpenter who will condescend to take instructions.

Take three well-selected American white planks, 21ft. long, 3in. thick, and 11in. broad, with two deep cuts, plane both sides well, and then select the thickest of them—for the three will not be exactly alike—and strike a line from end to end along each side  $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. from the edge. On this centre-board are nailed the other two boards, one on each side, giving an overlap of  $1\frac{1}{2}$ in., as directed by the lines; and, when thus nailed together, you have the bottom 30in. wide, with a channel in the middle about  $\frac{1}{2}$ in. deep and 8in. wide. Each side of the boards composing the joints should be well saturated with red lead and linseed oil, about the consistency of thick cream, and nailed together with a double row of nails on each side, the rows of nails broken alternately, so that the nails shall not be opposite to each other. All the nails to be driven from the under side, and holes bored with a piercer carefully selected to suit the size of the nails, and each nail about 4in. from its neighbour in each row. The nails should be made of copper by a professed nailer (not bought), should be light sixpenny size, with fine points for clinching, and protruding about one-quarter or three-eighths of an inch.

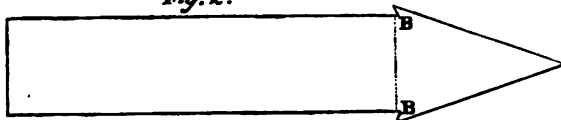
Having thus made perfectly water-tight joints, you proceed to form or shape the bottom, the same fore and aft, only leaving each end of the centre board 4in. square, that is, not pointed. When so shaped, the stem and stern pieces are nailed from the outside with strong copper nails  $\frac{1}{2}$ in. and  $\frac{1}{4}$ in. thick at the neck, and long enough to clinch on the stem and stern pieces inside, where they should protrude  $\frac{1}{2}$ in.; it is essential that the stem piece should be fixed very securely, as the recoil of the gun will try it severely.

The stem piece should be shaped in this form (Fig. 1), which we shall

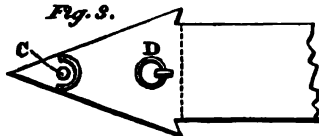


call its profile, and should be either oak or black birch, about 2ft. long, with a piece sawn out of the bottom of it to allow it to butt against the end of the centre board, which is left square at the end to receive it, and on which it will be nailed. The stem piece should be 6in. high and 4in. broad, and will butt against the end of the centre board at A. Remember, this joint and all joints to be well supplied with red lead and oil. Fig. 2 shows the shape of the stem piece the other way; the angular "quirks" at B and B are to receive the sides at full thickness three-eighths of an inch, without being reduced like "scarfs," so as to strengthen all against recoil. The

stern piece should be similarly shaped like No. 1 and 2, only 8in. or 8½in. high, and 7in. on top before being hollowed down, so as to receive a ½in.

*Fig. 2.*

hole at C, where, or rather into which, the rudder will be shipped, and to admit of a ring bolt at D (Fig. 8) to receive a tow rope.

*Fig. 3.*

Having secured your stem and stern pieces, and shaped the bottom, give the bottom inside a coat of thin red lead and oil (not thick like the cream), and leave it to dry, then proceed with your floorings, which consist of small alips, 1in. broad by ½in., of the same white deal, of which you will require about twenty. Now prepare two "alips," 1½in. square, about 21ft. long (they may be in two parts and scarfed in the middle), and these are to be securely nailed round the edge of the bottom, both bottom and alip to be well coated with thick red lead and oil, the nails driven from the under side, and holes bored with a piercer to suit the nails—not too large, which would admit water. These nails will be 2½in. long, so as to be clinched securely on top of alip.

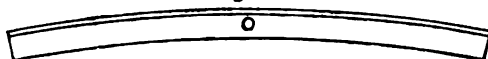
Your floorings are now to be cut to their proper lengths, and nailed across the bottom about twelve inches asunder, the holes to be bored through the centre of the floorings inside, and the nails driven as before, from the outside, and clinched on the flooring. The carpenter will now clean off the edge to receive the sides. He will form the edge square for about 18in. from the stem and stern pieces, and will gradually bevel it off towards the middle, so as to receive the sides which will be "flammed out." He will now fit a piece of ½in. stuff, white deal, into the sharp angle of the port side of the stern piece, to be well bedded as usual in thick red lead and oil, and securely nailed; and through this he will bore a ½in. hole with a sharp centrebit, to carry off any water which may be shipped; for if the canoe is carefully put together according to these instructions she will not make one drop of water until she is rent asunder, no matter how long she may be out of the water and housed in a boathouse.

Now for the sides, which are to be in three pieces on each side. Prepare four pieces of white deal boards ½in. thick and 9in. broad, free from knots, and fit them into the "quirks" of the stem and stern pieces, then coat the lower edges well with the red lead and oil, and also coat the alip and outer edge of the bottom with the same, and coat that part of the side with the

same which will be nailed to the stem and stern pieces ; then nail them on, one row of nails to be driven into the bottom board and another into the slip, and clinched securely on the slip inside. When these four pieces are thus nailed securely, the double row of nails to be about four inches asunder and the joints broken, so that no two nails shall be opposite to each other—you will have a perfectly water-tight joint. You now proceed to regulate the amount of "flamming" to be given to the sides, and this is done by forcing out the sides with a stick, on the principle of the butcher who puts a stick into his carcase of beef in order to keep the sides asunder. Each builder may please himself as to the amount of "flam," but the more she is "flammed" the more buoyant the canoe will be ; care, however, must be taken not to crack the side. When this is done the centre pieces may be nailed on, the joints made with a good long scarf, and well saturated with thick red lead and oil. The scarf nails should be made very fine, with broad heads and fine points, and about 1 in. long, which will give  $\frac{1}{2}$  in. for clinching. Be sure you calculate the number of nails that will be required for every part of the canoe, and have them all made the proper lengths, so as to have about  $\frac{1}{2}$  in. for clinching. Clinching is better than "rooving."

Having nailed on the sides, strike a line round the outside from stem to stern, which will be 6 in. high at stem and 8 in. or  $8\frac{1}{2}$  in. at stern, and saw off the superfluity. When the sawn edge is cleaned off with a plane to the same height at both sides, prepare a slip about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  in. square, to be nailed round this edge inside ; the nails, about 4 in. asunder, to be driven from outside and clinched on the slip inside. This done, now prepare a piece of white plank with a gentle curve in it, which we will call the "gun beam" (Fig. 4). It should be 4 in. broad and  $1\frac{1}{2}$  in. thick when finished, with a

Fig. 4.



$\frac{1}{2}$  in. hole through the centre of it to take bolt and nut. The upper edges of it should be "rabbited" to a depth of  $\frac{1}{2}$  in. and 1 in. broad, to receive the deck boards at each side of it, so that, when nailed, all will be "flush." Now measure 6 ft. from the stem head, and at the mark place your beam across, so that the after-edge of the beam shall be 6 ft. from the stem ; secure each end to the sides. This may be done by nailing a piece of stiffish sheet copper to the end of the beam, 4 in. broad and about 6 in. deep, which can be nailed to the side. Place a similar beam at the other end, 6 ft. from the sharp point of the stern piece, secured also with the sheet copper.

You are now ready for the bottom boards, which must be in three compartments. Prepare one piece of sheeting,  $\frac{1}{2}$  in. thick, the shape of the bottom, and put it together with slips  $\frac{1}{2}$  in. thick and  $1\frac{1}{2}$  in. broad, so that these slips shall not interfere with the floorings, but that it shall lie flat on them. (I should have mentioned before that the floorings nailed on the

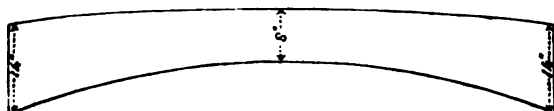


bottom should not touch the slips round the bottom edge; they should not extend within half an inch of the slip, so that no water may lie in the angles, but that it may have a clear run down the sides and down the centre channel). Prepare a similar piece of sheeting for the stern end. Both these sheetings should be 6ft. long, and, when in their places, the centre piece of sheeting may be prepared in the same way. It will be about 11ft. long, and will butt against the other two pieces, or sheetings, already prepared. All painting on the bottom should now be finished before the decks are put on, and if once well done with red lead and oil, they will never require it afterwards—that is, supposing the canoe to be housed.

Now prepare the rafters for the fore and aft decks. They may be of deal, about  $\frac{1}{2}$ in. square, and curved so as to correspond with the beams. They may be placed about 7in. asunder, and let into the slip, and nailed down through it. The slip at each side here may require some extra nailing, for the deck must be strong enough to bear the weight of a man upon it with the gun on his shoulder, as may sometimes happen.

Having carefully fitted your rafters, now sheet them over with boards  $\frac{1}{2}$ in. thick, fitting them well into the rabbet of the beams. You are now ready for the side decks, which should be each of one broad piece of yellow light pine (shaped as in Fig. 5), 14in. at each end, where they are securely

*Fig. 5.*



nailed into the rabbets, and about 8in. in the centre. Before they are nailed down, a slip of about  $\frac{1}{2}$ in. square should be nailed along the under side of the inner curve, in order to obtain a sufficient surface to nail on the "combings." These side decks of yellow pine should be  $\frac{1}{2}$ in. thick, and have a few light brackets, or knees, to support them underneath, and nailed to the sides, of light pine. They should be nailed securely down to the slip running along the sides.

When so far advanced, you prepare your stuff for "combings." In order to ascertain their height, throw a straight-edge across your side decks, near the fore beam, and measure the height from the bottom boards. This measurement will show what the height of your combings should be. The height of them should be 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. from the bottom boards, but you may have them 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. high at the other (stern) end. The thickness you have to nail them to is only about 1in., so they should be steamed at each end, to prevent too great a strain on the nails, and should be about  $\frac{1}{2}$ in. or  $\frac{3}{4}$ in. thick, and about 4in. or 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. broad; and, when nailed, you may gauge them, and clean them away to the before-mentioned heights. You will require some fixture at the end to secure them; the best fixtures for the purpose would be four little posts, of yew or oak, about 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. square, with a  $\frac{1}{2}$ in. pin, turned on the end, 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. long, and let into the beam with a  $\frac{1}{2}$ in. centre-

bit. This finish at the end gives strength to the "combing," and a neat finish. The space now between the posts may be filled up with straight "combing," if desirable.

Now, give your fore and aft decks a good coat of paint, and cover them with light sailcloth or canvas well dried at the fire, and nailed all round securely, being well stretched with copper tacks; and then prepare a light slip about  $\frac{3}{4}$  in. thick and  $1\frac{1}{4}$  in. broad, of American elm, and nail it on all round from stem to stern, covering the edges of the canvas, which will thus have a double nailing. Next you will prepare two pieces of board (deal), 7 in. broad and 2 ft. long, and about  $\frac{3}{4}$  in. thick, and hinge them on the deck in the form of a  $\Lambda$ . At the wide end of the  $\Lambda$  they will butt against the little posts of the "combing;" at the other end, where they form the sharp angle of the  $\Lambda$ , they will be bevelled off inside so as to form a close joint, and will be held together when up by a copper hook and eye. The four hinges will be of brass, about  $1\frac{1}{4}$  in. square. You will drive the iron pins out of them, and introduce copper pins instead, well hammered so as to stiffen them. These washboards will always lie flat on the deck, except when sailing. Similar boards are to be hinged in the same way on the after-deck. A pair of wash streaks are now to be prepared, the whole length of the side decks. They will be of light deal,  $6\frac{1}{2}$  in. broad and about  $\frac{3}{4}$  in. thick; will be hinged with one or two hinges in the middle to the deck, as close to the combings as possible. The curve will not admit of more than one or two hinges, but they will be sufficient for their purpose. The hinges should be long, so as to reach up high on the wash streak; for, the stuff being thin, unless they have a good bearing on the wood, the wood may split. These wash streaks will always lie flat on the side deck, except when required to make the canoe snug in a sea, being only secured with one or two hinges in the middle. When forced round in contact with the combings, they must be held by brass or copper buttons, fixed at the lower edge of the combings, which should keep them tight to the combings below; and at the upper end they will be secured to the deck washboards by a similar kind of fixture.

The fore washboards cannot be erected until the gun has been drawn down, with the muzzle resting on the "crutch." When the gun has thus been drawn down to lighten the bow, and the washboards fore and aft up with the washstreaks, one would not believe the canoe to be the same craft; and she will sail through a sea safely. But, though now nearly finished, we are not done with the canoe yet. A piece of about 13 in. should be cut out of the combings on the starboard or right side. To ascertain its whereabouts, an ordinary-sized man should lie down on the floor of the canoe with his legs and feet as far aft as he can stretch them, and then put his right arm over the side; for in this position the setter must propel the canoe when working up to birds, with either a setting pole or a paddle. When this place for the arm has been ascertained, let the piece be cut out to the length of eighteen inches, to give the arm good room, so that in the recoil at the canoe when a shot is fired the sharp edge of the combing shall not be driven against his arm; and this space so

opened must have a door hinged on it, which will be put up, and fastened with a button at each end, when not required to be put down.

To return now to other matters, the stem piece should be hollowed and nicely rounded to receive the rope breeching, which should be kept in its place by a strong copper staple driven into the stem. This can be easily removed when the rope may be required to be renewed, but should never be depended upon for towing; that must be provided for at the stern end, and for this purpose a hole has been already bored at D (Fig. 3), or should be bored with a  $\frac{3}{4}$ in. auger to receive a ring bolt; the bolt should be screwed. Another  $\frac{3}{4}$ in. hole is bored at C to receive the rudder, which will be described presently; on this hole a brass washer about  $2\frac{1}{2}$ in. in diameter should be secured with copper nails, and a  $\frac{3}{4}$ in. hole in the centre, with two spuds like the cocks on a horseshoe cast on it, to act as stops to prevent the rudder from going too far when pulled on one side or the other. This washer should be about  $\frac{1}{2}$ in. thick. The rudder should be of the shape shown in Fig. 6, the blade of  $\frac{3}{4}$ in. white deal, and the rest of Swedish

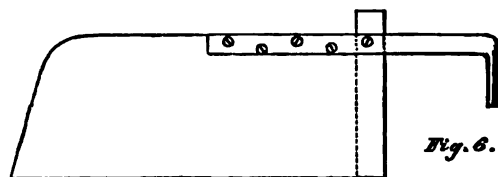


Fig. 6.

iron. The projection on the top is to receive a yoke head, with an eye at each end of it to receive a pair of yoke lines. The blade should be about 2ft. long by 9in. broad.

You next require a pair of oars 12ft. long, about  $2\frac{1}{2}$ in. in diameter where they are leathered; 4in. in the blade, and the rest in proportion. The setting pole will be made of white deal (as well as the oars), 13ft. long, and about 6in. in circumference at one end, reduced to about 5in. ditto at the other; a broad iron ring is driven on the thick end, and a hole bored up into the wood to receive a large heavy iron article shaped as in Fig. 7,

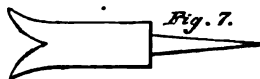


Fig. 7.

and sufficiently heavy to sink the pole in the water, so that when the upper end of it is in the man's hand, the other end will rest on the ground in the water. Thus, when the man is driving the canoe ahead, he will always find the pole on the bottom ready for another purchase, and will drive it too with considerable speed, if he has even a moderately strong arm.

He is supposed now to be working up to birds, lying nearly flat, but a little on the left side, with his head well down, and the shooter is supposed to be lying flat at his gun, with the long yoke lines (one in each hand) steering the canoe, so as to hide the man's action from the birds. The

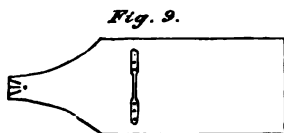
setter has only to drive the canoe ahead, either faster or slower as directed by the shooter, or to stop altogether if birds are scattered and he wishes to wait until they come together. I had almost forgotten to mention a ring-bolt, 3in. in diameter, to be screwed into the gun beam on the port side, and a small block with a square hole in it underneath, to receive the butt of the mast. A sprit sail is the handiest, as it can be reefed in a moment by taking out the sprit.

We must now look to the rowlocks, two on each side, opposite to each other, for sculling in case of necessity. They should be in this shape (Fig. 8), of brass, bell metal, or galvanised iron, with an oblong square



hole through the top to receive the outriggers, which should be made of flat Swedish iron galvanised, which would be stronger than round, for no craft gets such unmerciful usage as a canoe, when working after cripples. Some provision should be made to raise them, so that the oars may be used when the wash streaks are put up all round. A small hole might be drilled through them at the required height, and a pin run through it. The rowlocks should be screwed or bolted down on the outer edge of the sides, where the slip is left purposely strong to receive them.

So far the canoe is worked with the oars and setting pole; but in deep water she must be propelled, when working up to birds, with a paddle this shape (Fig. 9), of white deal board, ½in. thick, 9in. broad, and about

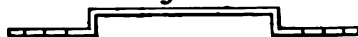


13in. long to the square, and 7in. to the top of the handle, about 20in. long in all, with a common trunk or box handle firmly secured where the line is drawn across. When this handle is grasped in the hand, the paddle will be in contact with the back of it, and, with a string through the top to secure it firmly to the arm, the setter will propel the canoe nearly as fast as with the pole, lying on his face on left side as before.

A little hatch should be placed in the middle of the after deck, near the ring bolt, about 6in. square, to admit the hand to secure the plug or cork into the vent hole in the bottom; it should be like a lid, to fit down on a little frame elevated above the deck about 1in., and secured down with a thumb screw at each side, or some other fixture, to prevent water getting in when pulling through a sea. When the canoe has shipped water and is brought to shore, take out the plug, elevate her a little at the bow and a little on one side, and every drop of water will run out. I am not aware now that we have omitted anything about her, except to fix a little

cranked bar of iron of  $\frac{1}{2}$ in. iron, about 9in. long, this shape (Fig. 10), on the top, and the straps at the end about 5in. long, to take three screws on

*Fig. 10.*



each side; the space under the bar to be about 1in. This bar will form a stretcher for the shooter, who will always pull the stroke oar, and for another purpose to be mentioned hereafter.

It will be most convenient for him to pull with his oar over the starboard side, as he sits facing the bow on a canvas cushion, 20in. long, 10in. wide, and 4in. deep, stuffed well with cork shavings, which any cork cutter will supply. When painted a light slate colour, water will never penetrate, and they will always furnish dry seats for rowing, both for the shooter and the setter. If lanyards are attached to them, they will become life-buoys in case of necessity. When the canoe now gets two coats of light slate-coloured paint, she will be found perfection, and should pull as fast as any gig with a pair of oars. In working after birds, both oars should lie on the port side on the deck, to be out of the way of the setter, and the rowlocks form good stops to prevent them falling off. The shooter should be provided with a little, short, light setting pole, about 5ft. long, with an iron fixture similar to the large one at the end of it, in order that he may be able to shove off the canoe should she take the ground when going after birds, and thus prevent the setter showing himself and spoiling the shot.

The canoe as here described would not be fit to contend with a heavy flow of ice, such as "Wildfowler" has described; but provision might be made for it by sheeting her over with copper; and very necessary it would be if she was to be subject to such a trial, as I knew of a case where an unprotected canoe was nearly cut clean through at the bow, and the occupant had a narrow escape of his life. When a canoe is kept on the shore in a boathouse, there should always be a carriage to convey her up and down, constructed with rollers, which save the bottom from being chafed and losing any of her black naval varnish, with which it should be coated. Without the convenience of a house, I cannot conceive how a canoe and a gun can be kept in any satisfactory condition.

These practical details are so excellent that no further description is required at my hands.

## CHAPTER XV.

### PUNTS—(*Continued.*)

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AN old gunner (Cumberland) of thirty years' standing, wrote me that he had built some ten punts, and, according to his opinion, the best measurements are as follows: Length of bottom, 18ft.; breadth, 2ft. 4in.; deck, 3ft. 2in. Material: Yellow pine,  $\frac{1}{2}$ in. in both bottom and sides, and the deck thinner, of course; oak timbers and knees, and the boat has at each end a rise of  $2\frac{1}{4}$ in. Her bottom is rounded one inch from the centre of the boards to make her more buoyant and easier to paddle both in rough as well as in smooth water. The reason why his boat is built with a  $2\frac{1}{4}$ in. rise at each end is that, by moving his body backwards or forwards, he can raise or lower the gun a foot or more to suit the birds when they are high or low, or far or near. The same plan is resorted to by all the punters in his locality (Cumberland), and I can quite understand its advantages, which are great, when a "set" gun is used. The gun my correspondent uses now, weighs 75lb., the barrel is 8ft. 8in. long, and the stock is made of oak and strong, and 14in. long from barrel to butt. The gun is fired with percussion caps; its loads are  $3\frac{1}{2}$ oz. of powder, and 12oz. of No. 2 chilled shot. My correspondent concludes by saying that he cannot agree with equal measures of shot and powder, and for his mode of firing he has a wedge block 2ft. long, 8in. broad, and 8in. deep, well padded, whereon to lay his breast. He pulls the trigger with his teeth, so that he does not take his hands from the paddles at

the time of firing, and can thus get nearer to the birds by keeping the punt going up to the last moment, and he can also keep the gun better on them. He (as usual with all practised punters) states that he waits for the flying fowl to rise, as it is obvious that many more birds can be killed then, when they are on the wing, than when they are sitting.

This summarises the contents of my correspondent's first note. In his next he says that, although I might think his boat light, he considered her strong, her ribs being only 8in. apart and  $\frac{3}{4}$ in. thick by  $1\frac{1}{4}$ in. wide, and she has knees on every other rib. Her bottom is formed of two boards joined together, and a  $\frac{1}{4}$ in. of hard wood on the outside by 3in. all the length of the boat; and two pieces of hard wood are fixed at the sides, they are  $\frac{3}{4}$ in. square and 9ft. long, and save the bottom and keep her steady. He also puts a piece of wood at the stern 2ft. long and 2in. thick at the stern, and runs it to nothing up the boat as a sort of keel. It makes her steer well, and does not hinder her to sail, but improves her when he moves backward and forward to raise the gun, "I dare not fix the gun," he goes on to say. "She lies on a crutch at the muzzle, and on the deck at the breech, and the recoil is neutralised by the block above referred to, upon which I rest the whole weight of my body. I cannot find breeching-ropes to answer. It would soon pull the boat to pieces; she is so light—say 12 stone at the most. The block lies on the bottom on a board, and the deck is higher at the stern by 3in. than at the stem, to admit of my putting my feet under. Myself and all appurtenances will weigh about 28 stone."

"Punter," however, disapproved of these measurements thusly:

"There were giants in those days," and I think I may safely say there are wonders in these. The most wonderful punt I have heard of for a long time is the one described by "Wildfowler" on Jan. 25, particulars of which were sent him by a Cumberland correspondent—another extraordinary "flat-bottomed" punt; the bottom is said to be only 18ft. long by 2ft. 4in. wide, and half-inch yellow pine, with neither keel, inbreast, or kelson, and has a spring of 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. fore and aft, which would in my opinion be increased to 1ft. 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. fore and aft if you stood in the middle; for a punt that length, built of half-inch yellow pine, would be like a whalebone. I feel convinced,

if this punt was placed evenly on a small beer cask, the two ends would reach the ground. The next extraordinary thing is the mode of firing the gun, which is as wonderful as the punt—a heavy gun, weighing 75lb., loaded with about thirty drachms of powder,  $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. of small shot, simply laid upon the deck, with a crutch forward to rest the barrel. The whole recoil is taken thus: the end of the stock strikes against the base of a wedge, upon which the gunner is lying; no spring, no rope, or anything else to ease the recoil or prevent the gun jumping overboard, or flying muzzle up and fracturing the gunner's skull. It is also a remarkable thing how a man can stand the shock—a recoil, amounting to, I should be afraid to say how many, hundreds of pounds weight. I must say I should like to see this wonderful method of punting. I would seriously advise all young punters not to adopt either the punt or mode of firing, for I think both dangerous in the extreme. If you have a "flat-bottomed" punt, let the bottom be made of wood 1in. full, or, what is better, 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. thick, and use either rope breeching or Hawker's spring.

To this "Cumberland" replied:

A correspondent, signing himself "Punter," remarks that my boats are too light; but, if he had to shift for himself, he would have to put his shoulder to the wheel. Let him have to carry his punt two hundred yards on his back before he got to the water's edge, and then come for the gun, and I think he would prefer a light boat. I have known an 8-stone gun taken four miles on the shoulder after a hard day's shooting, beside the fowl that was shot. He may well say there were giants in those days. I am about to build two more punts this summer, which I intend to make lighter. For illustration, put an empty match box on rough water, and he will see how buoyant it is. "Punter" prefers 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. or more thick for the bottom. I should like to know what water she will draw, as mine will go well with 4in. of water, and is very seaworthy. I cannot recollect ever shipping any water of consequence. She is very buoyant, and very firm, and will not bend as he describes.

I should like him to come over and inspect the punts, as there is nothing left short. I cannot afford to hire anyone, and "where there's a will there's a way." If "Punter" had to do the work himself that is done here, he would stay at home.

In these arguments "Cumberland" was backed up by Mr. Joseph Francis, of King's Lynn, who wrote:

"Punter" in his letter does not seem to approve of punts some 18ft. long and 2ft. 4in. wide in the bottom, and built very light.

If "Punter" ever had, single-handed, to pull his boat over the tail of a sand, and perhaps save his life by so doing, he would allow that for certain localities they are very good things.

"Punter" says he would like to see a boat-gun fired without spring, rope, or anything else. He can have his wish gratified by visiting the shores of the Wash any time during the gunning season. Of course, the operation requires



care; but, having done it for more than thirty years, I cannot call it dangerous. One great gain in case of accident is the gun being separate and detached from the boat, so that it is got rid of at once.

Some years past, I towed in to land a friend of mine who was hanging on to a capized punt. Where would he have been if his gun and boat had been fastened together? I say towed in because, being in a punt, I could not pick him up.

"Punter's" warning to young hands, as to not adopting certain punts and mode of firing, may be useful in some districts, but does not apply here. My boat is about 18ft. in the bottom, by 1ft. 6in. wide.

Mr. W. S. Everitt, of Carlton Colville, Lowestoft, then remarked:

When we see one (evidently no novice) of your correspondents admitting that he gunned in such a punt that he was unable to help a friend in distress further than by towing him in an ignominious position to shore, I think it is time that the subject of safe gun punts should be discussed, as I am sure that there will be found no valid reason for going afloat in unsafe ones in any waters.

The best authority which I know of on punts is Mr. R. F. Harmer, of Yarmouth, my old friend and companion, under whose guidance I have always possessed first-class boats. I have now one which was built under his superintendence and plans, which I believe will be found difficult to supersede for a boat capable of being worked either single or double-handed.

And "Cigarette" observed:

Let me, through you, advise "Cumberland" to build a single-handed punt after a good and approved model, such as the one described, for instance, as belonging to Mr. Harmer are (the dimensions of which are given at page 117). Let him also procure or make—it consists of little more than two wheels and a plank—a sling carriage for transporting his punt from house to water. This carriage is amply described in "Hawker," and any carpenter, amateur, or professional should turn one out for a pound or so.

His crank matchbox punt is indeed a failure if she takes four inches of water to float in. The heaviest double-handed oak bottom "man of war" I ever launched would float in less than that.

"Cigarette's" advice to "Cumberland" would only be good for taking the punt up or down at the "hard;" but I think "Cumberland" would experience some difficulty in having always the punt-carriage handy, when he has so much "overhaul" work to perform as he describes. I, however, thoroughly fancy, with "Cigarette," that a better and still lighter craft than "Cumberland" nows works ought to be secured by him.

But Mr. Francis stuck to his text, and wrote :

Your correspondents do not seem to me sufficiently to consider the value of speed.

Substantial, broad, safe punts are no doubt excellent things, but, if much launching or pace are necessary, they would not answer. Where there is great space, speed enables you to go over more ground, and consequently see more sport. Between thirty and forty miles, taking direct lines, have been gone over in a day's punt shooting from this place. Speed, too, is a great element of safety, for, if the weather becomes stormy, it enables the gunner to get in with the land, and so avoid the rising sea, and perhaps flowing tide. The loss of time, in a case of this sort, may be loss of life.

A narrow boat is also more sea-kind, and ships less water, whether being pushed or paddled, than a broad one.

The gunning work of this locality seems to be most easily and safely carried on in the class of punts we at present use ; but I do not presume to speak as to other places, which no doubt have their special requirements.

Mr. Joseph Francis is probably right in his advocacy of narrow light punts for the work he has to do in his district ; but I cannot say I like narrow punts. For one thing, they are too visible to the fowl ; and they also proportionately draw more water than their wider-beamed rivals—two great defects in my estimation ; and, as regards speed, some punts, built on the plans I advocate, can be rowed as fast nearly as pleasure outriggers. And my views are endorsed by Mr. Everitt and Mr. Frere, whose letters I append—

In reply to Mr. Joseph Francis, great speed can only be obtained by increased length, which has so many objections ; and, if your correspondent studies safety, surely he will look round at his neighbours' boats, and see if some improvement cannot be made in those he describes.

I remember hearing of more than one poor gunner being lost in the Wash district, at not very distant periods. Fair width gives stability, hence steadiness of aim and comfort, so desirable, especially in such long days as he describes, not to mention light draught (which I have found so desirable)—also, may I add, safety, as the shipping of water is comparatively unknown to me.

W. S. EVERITT.

It seems to me that your correspondent Mr. Joseph Francis, of Lynn, has never tried his narrow punt against a more substantial and broad punt ; but I think Hornigold, of his town, could give him some information on that point—for, some years ago, when I was there with a double-handed punt, we could, in setting to fowl, scull quite away from him, and he was considered a fast paddler ; and I think with two pair of sculls we could, at

any rate, have held our own against one in a narrow punt propelled with a double paddle, as used as Lynn.

As regards safety and seaworthiness, I know we could be out in our broad punt in such weather as would prevent a gunner from venturing out in a narrow punt; and it seems to me a new theory that a narrow punt should ship less water than a broad one.

Your correspondent has probably not had an opportunity of trying a broad punt, or I think I may venture to say that he would give up his narrow punt; and I am sure he would get more fowl in the course of the winter.

H. FREER.

And "Punter" replied to "Cumberland" as follows:—

Other matters "in the world's broad field of battle" prevented me writing sooner upon the subject. "Cumberland" certainly makes a mistake if he thinks I stay at home because there is work to do. I have worked hard, very, in both gunning punts and yachts. I have had to do it, as I have said on former occasions.

My opinion of the thin floor of a flat-bottom punt is not changed. The more I hear of it, the more I condemn it, though with all respect to "Cumberland's" opinion; but my serious belief is that, if the punt is made as described, it cannot be seaworthy. To stand the roll of a sea, the boat must be as firm as possible from stem to stern. When we consider the bottom of a flat-bottomed punt being simply a deal board only half an inch thick, but nearly a yard wide and about seven yards long, with nothing to support it, will not common sense say that it will bend with its own weight, and, if put on an ordinary beer barrel, the two ends would reach the ground; or place the ends upon two barrels, and stand upon the board in the middle, what would the result be? How is it possible for a boat so made to stand the roll of a sea or broken water, I cannot imagine; and, unless the punt is very different to the description, or a very important part omitted, I would strongly advise "Cumberland" and others to keep in shallow water in such a craft; for I am convinced, if they do not, they will have a hard time to "keep their bones from Davy Jones" in a squall. I quite agree with "Cumberland" as to having a boat as light as possible; but you must have strength. A "match box" will do very well for floating on the waves, and is no doubt very buoyant; but people don't care to trust their lives in "match boxes." A gunning punt must be strong, and, of course, light. I think "Cumberland" will find the punt I have previously described will far supersede his, be more buoyant, draw less water, and stand any sea until she is actually swamped, because the keel is strong and the timbers bind all together firmly. It only draws 2in. or 3in. of water, and can be pulled along by one man—I don't say carried, because of the bulk, but the weight would not be great. As I stated before, a flat-bottomed boat must have the floor very strong, because it has to support all in the boat. I see "Cigarette" indorses my opinion of "Cumberland's" craft.

I should like to draw "Wildfowler's" attention to sailing a punt stern

first. I agree that neither Folkard or Hawker speaks of it, but he will find that I strongly advised the method in the *Field* some time ago, and gave my reasons for so doing. I have adopted the plan for years. F. S. H. will find that all good models of gunning punts are 2in. to 4in. higher amidships than at stem and stern. Filling the boat with cork shavings makes her very heavy. If the compartments are water-tight, she does not require cork; but it is a difficult matter to make water-tight compartments in a gunning punt, there being so little wood to fasten to, and they are sure to strain more or less; and if water gets into these compartments, they are far better open. The best method is indiarubber bags that will stand frost, made the shape of the boat stem and stern, and when in their place blow them full of air through a tube and tap. These are much lighter and far more buoyant than cork. I invented them some time ago, and find them answer well; they are now made by S. Bradbury and Co., Tranmere, Birkenhead, and made to fit any boat at small cost. Mr. Joseph Francis appears to forget that I wrote for the benefit of amateur punters, and no doubt "Wildfowler" does the same; and although I have had years of experience in gunning punts, and have shot in narrow punts with safety, I recommend young punters to use safe boats, and when they have become experienced punters they can use boats as narrow as they choose with advantage. But they will not then need my advice; so those who can use narrow punts don't require hints on wildfowling, or dictation as to which is or is not the best for them. We don't teach to row by putting a novice in a racing outrigger. Amateurs cannot be cautioned too much about safety; let safety be your first consideration, a big bag the next; a big bag is dearly bought if it is purchased at the risk of human life. Never go where you cannot see a clear way to return; never leave your boat unless you are sure to get at it again. In conclusion, let your first thought always be safety; don't let the most tempting bait run you into danger.

After this long discussion, the matter appeared settled, but Mr. Francis still held to his own views, as will be seen below:

"Wildfowler" seems to agree with the narrow light punt for certain districts, and that is all I contend for.

Mr. Everitt speaks of more than one poor gunner being lost in the Wash district, which is a sad truth. But I am not aware of any serious accident having taken place for some years; perhaps this may be explained by the increased speed of their boats enabling them to get out of bad weather.

"Shipping water is comparatively unknown to me," says the same gentleman. I can only say, the winds and waves must have been very kind to him, or his experience very limited, whatever sort of craft he may have used.

Mr. H. Frere refers me to Hornigold of this town, on the subject of broad and narrow punts. This is the opinion of that worthy after reading

Mr. Frere's letter: "I am sure a long narrow punt would drown a broad low punt in a seaway." He also says he could scull faster to birds in narrow craft. He well remembers Mr. Frere's visit to Lynn, and the very substantial broad, double-handed boats he brought with him. If I do not mistake a stout smack generally attended upon the sportsmen.

"Punter" towards the end of his excellent letter, cautions the amateur as to avoiding danger, and gives some useful advice, with all of which I fully agree. At the same time he must allow, that in some places, a certain amount of risk must be run when carrying on the sport.

To conclude, the young single-handed punter must serve an apprenticeship before he can be a master, and must feel his way with great care. He will find that heavy boats will not do for launching or hauling up, or pulling over a sand. He will also find that he cannot make a broad boat go as fast or be as sea-kind as a light narrow one. He will soon discover that it is safer to have his gun detached and separate from his boat, and that it is more convenient in many ways.

When firing, the recoil will cause his gun to slide in some 5in. along his chest, which should be pressed firmly to the butt. If he were in a heavy boat, the kick would be dangerous.

The light narrow punt and the shooter will all go back together, the craft getting strong stern way, and this eases the recoil. One thing I am sure of—if ever the young hand, after a long stalk to birds, gets a good shot, he will never cease to be a wildfowler.

JOSEPH FRANCIS.

As regards Mr. Francis's letter, I must state again my views anent punts. A narrow punt is necessary whenever a good deal of carrying or "crowding" work has to be done; but that "a long narrow punt would drown a broad low punt in a seaway" is quite against my experience. The broad punt will live when the narrow one will fill; *ergo*, the narrow craft will do well amongst the latches, but the broad one will be better and safer in the open. At least, that is my opinion. And Mr. Everitt backed up this opinion thus:

I am gratified to observe that my views regarding fairly broad punts are indorsed by the majority of your correspondents. In a breeze I have found such work easier, and I fancy faster, than lighter ones; but clearly, when great distances are traversed, the occasional assistance of a sail settles the point, although the sail should be used as seldom as possible, as few birds will stand its being lowered, and one can only under certain circumstances, kill as well under canvas as when sculling. Many a time I have crossed channels under canvas, the waves of which I otherwise hesitated to face.

This brought the discussion to an end; but the following

letter from S. S. G. dealt with some of the Norfolk punts :—

As the punts used in these parts (Norfolk) are altogether different from those mentioned by "Wildfowler" in the *Field*, their dimensions may be interesting to some of your readers.

My first was built at Lynn by a boat builder, who is also a punter—19ft. 2in. over all, 15ft. 6in. on bottom, 2ft. 3in. beam over all, 18½in. bottom, 8in. deep at bows, 9½in. at stern. This style of punt answers very well when used with a bladed set pole, or paddled where there is plenty of water, and not very much turning to be done.

My next was 17ft. over all, 14ft. on bottom, 2ft. 4½in. beam, 20½in. bottom, depth at bows 7in., aft 9in. This was an improvement on the first, but not enough beam for my liking.

Another 16ft. 8in. over all, 14ft. on bottom, 2ft. 5½in. beam, 21½in. bottom, depth at bows 7in., at stern 9in.; and the last 17ft. over all, 15ft. on bottom, 2ft. 8in. beam, 23½in. bottom, depth at bow 6in., at stern, 8½in. If I had another built, I should have the same length, depth, and beam over all, but 28in. bottom instead of 23in. I have tried more beamy punts, but found that they go very hard when paddled to windward, and with the wind abeam they drive, too, on the lee hand.

All the above-mentioned are flat-bottomed, with the usual 2in. or 2½in. spring fore and aft, and are decked all round.

Sculling and setting are, for some reasons, preferable to paddling. The punter is always ready with the trigger to pull at a moment's notice, and his arms are not seen at all when sculling, nor when setting, if favoured by wind or tide; but on the other hand paddling is far preferable for night work—in fact, for night punting I don't see how sculling or setting can be done satisfactorily. Suppose, for instance, on a starlight night you hear a company of widgeon at a distance, on the flats just being covered by the tide. You make your way towards the noise, and if they cease piping, you pin your boat and wait until they are again in charm. What would you do with a scull or setpole? How could you hold your punt for perhaps a quarter of an hour in only a light breeze, with the tide running over the flats, without showing your broadside?

In daylight it is a different thing; you can then see the fowl, go up to them and shoot; but even in daytime, during very sharp weather, I have frequently known ducks to get from a bad position into a good one, if you only have patience and wait by them; but in mild weather, as soon as ducks begin to swim away from each other, shoot if you are near enough. They will only get worse and worse, or go away altogether and call again later on; but this is a very dangerous experiment on public water with many land gunners about.

I do not agree with "Wildfowler" as to the advisability of always keeping as much to leeward of fowl as possible. When working to divers or diving ducks it is certainly better to go with the wind well abaft the beam; these birds must meet the wind in order to rise, and they are loth to

do so with you just in the direction that they want to go; for the same reason you can get much nearer to full snipe walking down than up wind. Moreover, diving ducks will generally give a good shot just before rising, when they all swim round to meet the wind; but if you go up wind at them, as soon as they "fault" you they will form line and swim away, and if there are fifty of them you will probably not get more than two or three to shoot at. Even with duck, teal, and widgeon I prefer going with the wind just abaft the beam; you can see them "fault" better, and they invariably give a better shot just before taking wing. I also fancy that a slight ripple going from the gun does not cripple the shot so much as one coming straight at it. Of course with all ducks except divers it is fatal to go through the wind; that must be as carefully avoided as going down the track of the moon. I have had some punting on a broad where there is a bank running the whole length, with water each side; and it seems rather curious that fowl (suppose them to be sitting at 150 yards from the bank) will "fault" you if you go through the wind of them on the opposite side, but will not do so if you keep close under the bank on their side.

I have had some rather warm discussions with punters as to what becomes of the shot after it has struck smooth water. Some say that, by placing the gun so as to meet the water at forty yards, all the charge will fly just above the water at eighty yards, and that the velocity of those shot that have struck the water is scarcely impaired at all. I always prefer to shoot at the feet of fowl on smooth water, but should very much like to hear "Wildfowler's" opinion on the subject. All punters should know exactly how their guns shoot: some elevate the shot, others depress it. A friend of mine has a gun, and a good one too, that elevates so much that, if fired point blank at thirty yards, nearly all the shot would go above the mark; and I have a trumpet-mouthed gun which does just the reverse.

I quite indorse "Punter's" statement that double-handed punts are not to be compared with single-handed ones, simply for the reason that two skilful punters cannot kill half as many fowl in a double as they could in two single-handed punts; and I think all will admit that, taking day and night work into consideration, a single-handed punt, if built for sculling, will draw no more water than a double-handed one, and need have no more freeboard. Folkard's single-handed punt was 4in. forward, and 8in. aft; Hawker's double-handed one, 4in. forward, and 11in. aft. That doesn't look like less freeboard; and as to a double-handed punt getting nearer to fowl than a single, I must again differ. Let anyone look end on at a single-handed punt, sculled or set, and also at a double-handed one, and judge for himself which looks the more formidable; and, again, all the signs and wonders with the punter's feet, to make his puntman understand what to do don't improve his chance; and for night punting, which is as Folkard justly observes, the time for an experienced punter to fill his boat, they are utterly useless compared with a single-handed punt paddled. Some people I know think it very nice to be able to keep their hands dry, to take as much luggage as if they were going out to stay for a week, and above all to

be able to take it easy; but that is not my idea of punting. Nevertheless, double-handed punts are very useful for beginners, for the same reason that a perambulator in our very early years is preferable to a velocipede. A man who has never been in a punt in his life may, with the aid of a good hand to scull him, kill some shy fowl, whereas, in a single-handed punt, he might just as well try to fly.

The handiest sail for a punt in my opinion is a spritsail bent to the mast. All you have then to do is to step the mast, ship the sprit, and away you go, i.e., if your anchor is not out, as happened to a friend of mine the other evening. We were starting for a night of it, and I heard my chum grunting, declaring that his boat had got the ground, and he couldn't move her an inch. He nearly killed me with laughing, and himself too, when he found out his mistake. This same friend started on one occasion without first putting the cork into his punt, and sagely remarked, with his boat nearly half-full, that he fancied she made a little water. Luckily we were only in about eight inches, so the evil was soon remedied.

My first punting expedition taught me a lesson I shall remember all my life. I started at sundown, in company with another punter, to do some muds about two miles away. It is needless to say that I went overboard once or twice during the journey; but, fortunately, the water was shallow. Even then, in a sitting posture, it was too deep to be altogether enjoyable. At last we reached the feeding ground, and my companion soon found a small bunch of widgeon, consisting of six. It was bright moonlight and very frosty. His gun missed; but mine went; and I can tell you I was as pleased as Punch when we shoved up to find the six ducks on the water. We hadn't gone much further before we heard some more widgeon, and as we were drawing up to them, I said, "Just wait a moment whilst I get other paddles; these don't work well. So I crawled forward, pulled an oilskin up against the trigger, and off went the gun. When I looked up it was pointing straight for my companion's head. My weight forward had given the boat a sheer his way. I called out, "Have I shot you?" He said, "I don't know yet; but you've blown my gun out of the boat." My charge had struck the breech of his gun (weighing 6st.) about six inches in front of his face, had taken it clean out of the boat, and the only damage done was a hole in his wash streak, and a small piece out of the stock of the gun where it fits the barrel. It was a most providential escape, but, as my fellow punter observed, rather too near to be pleasant. I tried to stand up in my punt, but my knees played the bones, and I don't think I could have loaded my gun to save my life.

S. S. G. gives some good measurements of punts, but he mistakes my meaning as to keeping to leeward when working up to fowl. I meant simply that on no terms should the punter go to windward of the fowl (except to Brent geese), but he should sail to their lee in such a way that, on bringing her to, he can have a shot at once. S. S. G. is quite right as to firing



at the feet of the fowl with most guns on smooth water. Were he to aim at their heads, his shots would fly over them altogether; but a great deal rests with the gun, whose idiosyncracies must be studied.

Some remarks of mine were then discussed by "Punter" in the appended note:—

"Wildfowler," in one of his papers, again treats of double-handed punts, from which it must be inferred that "gentlemen puntsmen" are not punters at all, but simply punt-gun shooters, being either set or sculled to birds by an assistant, and doing nothing themselves but pull the trigger. Every punter well knows that all the trouble, caution, care, and perseverance are required in getting to the birds; so if the "gentleman puntsmen" gets a shot at all it is from the skill and tact of the assistant, who would in this case be better alone, as he would have less trouble and risk in getting to birds. But I have not found such to be the case; my experience (not confined to one country) is that gentlemen who take to punting care but little for the hardships attending this most fascinating and skilful sport, but willingly take either scull, paddle, or setting-stick in hand, and pride themselves in being able to work their own way to birds; herein is all the charm and excitement of wildfowling in a gunning punt. Well, we all differ more or less, and I fear I have more holes to pick in "Wildfowler's" paper, and I have no doubt he will be glad to hear it.

I am rather surprised "Wildfowler" should complain of "exhausting himself with downright hard labour." Now, I do not like hard labour, and object to it from principle, though I had to do it a time or two in gunning punts and larger craft; but it has not been voluntary. I have been in a fix more than once on the "briny deep," and so far worked my way out even "by hard labour;" and every man who treads a yacht's deck or ventures in a gunning punt to sea, will have to do it sooner or later if he means to "keep his bones from Davy Jones;" but I trust all your readers will do that "where'er they be."

I use a single-handed punt as much as many men, and go long distances at times to the shooting, but in these cases I do not either row or sail my gunning punt. I have a good seaworthy 18ft. boat, with sails and oars, this is what I use instead of a double-handed punt. My man or men, as the case may be—or perhaps a friend or two with me—go in the large boat (not forgetting refreshment), and tow the punt behind until we reach our destination. We search about with a powerful field glass (far better than a telescope) for game, which sighted, we "heave to;" I get into my gunning punt, arrange my gun, ammunition, &c., and push off, leaving the large boat to follow at a respectful distance, to join in the cripple chase or give a hand if anything goes wrong. After the shooting we have often a very jolly sail home, enjoying our refreshment, discussing the incidents of the day, and towing our little punt as before. I do this, as I said before, for all distant expeditions, unless the weather is bad, when I either take the yacht or stay at home.

In my opinion a wildfowler, to thoroughly enjoy the sport, must be his own punter; and I fail to see the necessity of "downright hard labour" if he has a boat attending him. My serious advice to all amateur punters is to have a good seaworthy boat in attendance; you can never tell how soon it may be required. Many difficulties may arise when immediate help is necessary, and perhaps of vital importance, especially in flat-bottomed boats with fixed knees and recoil springs. I have seen a fixed knee suddenly drag away and draw thick bolts right through the  $1\frac{1}{2}$  in. boards, of which the bottom had been made; the result was that she filled like a basket; and if another punt had not been near, the big gun would certainly have sunk the punt, and perhaps the gunner too. I hate fixed knees of every kind, and every other appliance for suddenly checking the recoil of a heavy gun. I like my guns to have free play, with a rope breeching through a hole in the stem. There is no strain then upon one particular part, and the rope must go if anything, no matter how light the boat may be. There are other dangers that I have met with in my punting expeditions at sea of little moment when help has been near, but most serious when no aid was at hand, which I may relate some day for the benefit of those ardent punters whose zeal overcomes discretion. However, have help near you when far from shore; you may be tempted to follow birds too far, and help is very useful to collect wounded birds or give a hand if you get tired; you can enjoy the sport far better, you will have less anxiety and more confidence.

As to sailing a gunning punt, my gunning punt sails well, without any of the dangers and difficulties mentioned by "Wildfowler." I use a spritsail made of brown holland, and "roped" with strong whipcord. The sail is laced to the mast with the same kind of cord (a fixture); I use no halyard rings or anything of the kind, and I have never lost a mast or been capsized. The mast is  $1\frac{1}{2}$  in. square, red deal, tapering to the head round; the mast is shipped through a square knee, screwed in the corner of the main deck and side deck, five feet from the stem and only six inches from the gunwale, starboard side. It is "stepped" into a step screwed on the bottom boards; it is then out of the way of everything. The "sheet" I bring aft, and "belay" on a pin, or hold in my hand; generally the latter, as I can let it go any time. I find with the sheet brought well aft my punt will sail on a wind much better than might be expected—the keel gives her more "grip;" but a flat-bottom boat makes direct leeway, slews away before the wind like a saucer. If a squall springs up, I can let go the sheet, down sprit, unship the mast, and roll all up together, put under the side deck, and all is snug directly, without either trouble or danger.

"Cigarette" is of the same opinion as myself respecting most things—Col. Hawker's outriggers, &c.; but we differ widely in punts, as he will see by this and former letters. I once used flat-bottomed boats—"bad luck to them," many a scrape they got me into; but I set to work to produce a clinker-built punt, as flat as a flat-bottomed boat, but more buoyant,

lighter, and seaworthy, and to sail decently. After spending time and money with models, I think I succeeded in designing a boat after my own heart, which I had built under my own supervision ; and I must say that I have never seen as good a boat, and I have seen hundreds. I think when "Cigarette" sees a good clinker-built punt, he will change his opinion. I saw one a few days ago that had been built by a Birkenhead firm, from the same model, for a gentleman. It had rather more beam, but less freeboard, than mine. A more beautiful model could not be imagined, and when seen end-on was hardly discernable, the sides being straight. It did not cast any dark shades on the water like a flat-bottomed ; and, as for being seaworthy, I believe it would live out all the double-handed punts on the coast in a sea, beside being so dry and tight and easy to manage.

Now, in my opinion, "Punter" is mistaken if he thinks that shooters who resort to double-handed punts are necessarily lazy fops. If he reads "Cigarette's" letter he will find that such is not the case ; and certainly I, in a double-handed punt, get as much work to do as I like, and enjoy myself more. When I said that I objected to exhausting myself, I spoke advisedly. Many and many a time have I sat up in a single-handed punt, wiped my brow and neck, and opened my coat, waistcoat, and even shirt whilst reeking with perspiration, and I groaned in spirit at the prospect of so much more hard labour yet in store for me. The sight of fowl had kept me going steadily ahead throughout, and, when wishing to go back, I found I had many miles to row over, a strong tide against me, and a head wind all the way perhaps ; and I was already "done," it should be borne in mind, with my previous fowling exertions. This being so, I think I am right in my views ; and it strikes me that "Punter," who sails to his resorts, practically also objects to doing more hard labour than he can help. Having a sailing boat in attendance is excellent fun, but when a man goes punting every day almost, the sailing boat continually in attendance becomes a rather expensive accompaniment to his punting, as I can testify. I kept two cutters, a 3 and an 8 tonner at one time, purposely to sail about with my punt ; but, though the plan was very comfortable, a man and a boy and the repairs to the yachts cost me some 300*l.* a-year, which made my birds very costly—in fact, they were very "dear" birds in both senses : dear to my

soul and dear to my pocket. It was, however, quite awfully nice, and I can recommend the plan to those who can afford it, as the very essence of enjoyment.

About sailing punts, I do not fancy "Punter" using a red deal mast. Red deal is nearly as heavy as oak, and almost as hard; but, of course, if "Punter" holds the sheet in his hand and lets it go at any time, as he says he does, why, I don't exactly see how he can come to grief. But this holding of the sheet is *precisely* what I object to. If I am getting on to birds, I make all fast, so as to have nothing but the rudder lines and the gun to attend to. How does "Punter" manage in such a case? Does he (1) hold his sheet, (2) the rudder lines, and (3) trim his gun all at one and the same time? If so, he is far more clever than I am, for I cannot do all that simultaneously; and I am at a loss to know how he manages it.

As regards "Punter's" punt, I have, privately, seen her plans; and I must say that she appears to me everything that could be wished. By the way, no wonder "Punter" uses a stout mast. He sails with a very small sprit sail, which I should imagine could hardly capsizes his punt, if it tried ever so hard. This, then, accounts for our difference of opinion on the subject.

The topic of safe punts is one of paramount interest to wildfowl shooters, and I have endeavoured to give such measurements as will insure safety to puntsmen, if their crafts are built according to the directions given; but there are some fowling districts where so much "overland" work has to be done, that lightness has to reign supreme, and, accordingly and proportionately, stoutness and corresponding safety have to be given up to a great extent, and it cannot be helped. Of course, amateurs with plenty of money, can always command plenty of help; and this being so, even when a good deal of dragging or carrying over the flats has to be done, the craft can always be retained of great stoutness, there being sufficient muscle at hand to manage her and the gun; but when the punter has to do everything himself, as "Cumberland" has to do, then it would be a matter of perfect impossibility for him

to manage a heavy punt—hence the very light craft he has to resort to. I do not like his punt, mind, but some punters are so wedded to their own types of craft, that any other model sets them laughing; but this is not as it should be—it is universal, nevertheless; and there is not probably any other sporting subject on which shooters differ so much as that of punts and punt building. Be that as it may, I believe I have impartially given measurements adapted for all sorts of wild-fowl resorts, and I must thank all who have helped me in the good cause.

“Punter’s” punt is clinker-built, and possesses two great advantages, viz.: (1) she throws no dark shade over the water, her sides being rounded; and (2) she has more bearing than a flat-bottomed punt. These points are self-evident at the most cursory of glances at her plans, which, by the way, I should like to publish, but must not—as it would be hardly fair to the designer to rob him of the fruits of his labour and ingenuity.

The other advantages claimed for this punt by “Punter” are:

“1. That the breeching rope, being over the deck, can be readily examined and renewed at any time.”

This, however, is no new feature, and I fail to see the direct relevancy of the remark. All breeching ropes are on the decks, and can readily be examined and renewed at any time.

“2. The stem being strong oak, supported by the planking, will stand the recoil of the largest gun.”

This, of course, will depend entirely upon the stoutness of the oak stem and how well backed it will be by the planking and bottom; for, very heavy guns with full loads drag a punt terribly to pieces if she is not everywhere sound and strong in the stem—when the gun is used with a 2in. hemp breeching-rope especially. However, in his punt, “Punter” uses a 43-pounder, firing 21drs. of Hawker’s punt powder and 9oz. of RB shot, and I can well imagine that his punt will stand that quite easily and readily.

“3. The absence of all heavy knees and fittings, as the gun lays flat along the deck.”

This lightness of build (beyond at stem) is inherent to all punts used with a rope. Here, I may as well explain "Punter's" *modus operandi* with his gun. She lies flat on deck, as stated, and, her fore end being made flat, she sets thus quite readily. Then near the break off, the fore end is abruptly cut to a right angle, so as to fit against the beam that supports the deck. In this manner, when the thimble of the breeching-rope is shipped into by the gun hook, both recoil and after-recoil are provided against—the former by the rope and the latter by the beam. Moreover, "Punter" nips the long stock of his gun between his arm and side, and no doubt this saves much of the jarring which, otherwise, inevitably would occur.

"4. The keel, though small, gives the punt direction and some power of beating to windward, though perhaps not much. She does not slew round like a flat-bottomed punt in a breeze, is much quicker in her movements, and will go over very shallow water."

This I can quite conceive from her drawing, and most fully indorse.

"5. She is very light—much more so than a flat-bottomed boat—more seaworthy, and will carry sail better."

All of which is so self-evident from her plans that I am seriously thinking of getting a punt built on her lines for single-handed work, and I have written to "Punter" accordingly. "Punter's" outriggers are, he says, movable, very simple, and easily taken off, but I have not yet seen their description. "The planks and decks of the punt are made of half-inch yellow pine, good, selected wood, entirely free from knots," says "Punter," "and the only crutch I use is a simple rest, like a billiard rest, just for night shooting and keeping the muzzle steady; but it is not required for actual shooting in the day time." From a previous communication of "Punter's" in the *Field*, I gather that he prefers a long stock to his gun; not only because it deadens the recoil when nipping the stock between the arm and side and makes all safe, but one's arm being on the stock, one can readily elevate the muzzle when required from shooting; and this agrees with my views. "I

use," "Punter" goes on to say, "hemp rope, because it is far more elastic and stronger than manilla."

In part of this, however, I quite join issue with "Punter." But let us hear what more he has to say :

The great value of manilla is its lightness, and that it is not elastic, a strip of yacht hawser made of hemp would stretch tremendously with a heavy strain, and, should it break, it would fly, and very likely kill someone. On the contrary, manilla would break and drop without doing the damage spoken of.

All this is no doubt true as regards the enormous and steady strain which may now and then be made to bear on hemp hawsers ; but this has nothing whatsoever to do with a gun's rope breeching, where the strain is sudden, sharp, and not to be compared with the tremendous and long pulls inflicted on hawsers. Therefore I contend that manilla, of sufficient stoutness, is vastly preferable to hemp, since it will stretch, and certainly not break, and ease the recoil very smoothly. On the other hand, precisely on account of its hardness, a hemp rope will make a gun shoot harder than manilla. But the question now is only how best to take up the recoil with safety to the punt ; and I certainly opine for manilla rope.

"Hemp lasts much longer," says "Punter." Perhaps so ; but the expenditure of a rope-breeching now and again is not very great. So we may dismiss that point from our consideration.

"Hemp being tarred does not hold water, which makes manilla shrink so much that you could not get the gun on her breeching at all in wet weather," adds "Punter."

Now, a hemp rope being tarred, necessarily must not stretch. If it did, the tarring would be of but little use, since the rain or sea water would get through the chinks to the core of the rope. *Ergo*, a tarred rope-breeching does not stretch ; *ergo*, one might just as well use an iron rod for breeching, and let the punt bear the brunt, which *must* be the case by "Punter's" plan. Therefore, by such a system, the recoil is, in reality, taken by the stem of the punt, and if she were aground, hard and fast, and the gun were heavy and heavily-loaded, the chances would be great that the punt would give way. This

being so, I cannot call this way of doing things a desirable one. It is simply securing the gun by a rope to the stem of the punt; as to taking up the recoil the rope does nothing of the sort, and this may answer with a 48lb. gun, but above that weight it would not do; and I would certainly advise manilla if a rope is desired, or a steel spring, or else an indiarubber frame similar to that which Mr. Hugh Silver and I have devised.

As regards manilla shrinking so much, one is not obliged to have the rope made of the exact length, as "Punter" does with his hemp rope (thereby proving, by the way, that I am right in my surmise that his rope is like an iron rod, since it is always of the same length), but it could be made fast to a thimble rigged on the gun stock, according to the length needed. Therefore, his argument that with manilla one could not get the gun on its breeching in wet weather is untenable.

If the plans sent me by "Punter" are correct, his punt measures 16½ft. by 3ft. (a good beam for her length), she is 6in. at stem, 8in. at stern, 10in. amidships, and she is provided with two mast holes, fore and aft, near the scantling, so as to sail her stem or stern first; bilge oak pieces to save her bottom when she is heaved up and down the beach; and a keel. On the whole, then, I think that "Punter's" system of punt is to be recommended, however much I may disagree with him as regards his plan of taking up the recoil with a tarred hemp rope.

Whilst on the subject of breeching ropes, I have already mentioned that a recoil frame has been devised by Mr. Hugh A. Silver and me for swivel guns. But when punts are too light to take swivels of any sort, a breeching rope of great power and elasticity is desirable; and for this desideratum again I have provided, in the shape of an indiarubber rope or band running from bows to gun, to take up the recoil, and a shorter one to provide for the after-recoil. These two ropes can be fitted to any punt gun and any punt, and all straining of the craft wilt thus be put an end to. Moreover, the kinking of the usual ropes, and their shrinking, &c., will



be done away with, as their indiarubber rivals are always of the same length, always firm, always elastic, and are totally unaffected by the weather; they can be made of any sizes, to ease the recoil of both light and heavy guns, and I flatter myself that puntsmen will be pleased to hear of this new device of mine. In ordering such, the orders should state the weight of the guns, their loads, and the lengths from bows to trunnions, or to hook on gun, and how the ropes are to be affixed to the punt, i.e., a single rope rove through the stem, or a double rope, fitted with two eyes, into which to ship the trunnions.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

### PUNTS—(*Continued.*)

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WHEN Colonel Hawker said, "There is not a boat builder in a thousand who knows anything about punts," he was not only right then, but his dictum, strange to say, is also right now up to this day. It is only those builders who live amongst punters who understand at all what is required; and, as they generally have a turn after the fowl now and then themselves, they come to learn pretty accurately all the delicate points which a fowling punt must possess in order to be thoroughly reliable and handy. Give the same orders and the same plans to two ordinary builders, and pray compare their handiwork when they have done their respective jobs, and you will be astonished, I will warrant. Yet any one of these men, when asked the preliminary question, will reply that he thoroughly understands gunning punts. The fact is they think they do, and, to all outward appearances, then turn out plausible craft; but try them, ay, that's the hitch! Thus there are at the present day scores of punts, here, there, and everywhere, which have been over and over sold to intending puntsmen, who soon have resold them again to the original builders, and the latter make a small income out of these "flat-catchers."

It happens in this wise. The builder, without understanding at all what he is doing, builds according to his views; on inspection and trial, the intending buyer finds the craft unreliable and unmanageable, and there is a "row."

"I won't have her," says the buyer.

"You'll have to," replies the builder; "I made her to your order."

"Oh, but I did not order you to build such a tub!"

"Well, I worked according to your instructions, and if the punt does not turn out as you expected, *you* are to blame, not I," &c.

Of course money has, probably, been paid already, as the punt progressed, and so the builder has the upper hand over the buyer, who finally gives up the money as lost, and the punt as useless. This punt, then, is kept in the building yard, and is sold, by turns, to dozens of sportsmen, who all have to forfeit their deposits.

Of course there are builders and builders; and I do not, for a moment, wish to say that all builders are not to be depended upon, but there are some of whom buyers will do well to fight shy. Anyhow, there is a very good precaution to be taken whenever a sportsman wishes to have a craft built, and that is, never to give a deposit on his order unless he knows his man to be a thoroughly reliable man. I have been robbed twice myself in that way, hence I think mine is a very pardonable caution. In short, I feel rather sour on the subject, even to this day, and no doubt many similar complaints can be made by sportsmen. It seems that a gentleman who wishes to have a punt built is looked upon by some builders as a perfectly lawful prey. I have known a young fellow fleeced of nearly 60*l.* for his punt. In fact, he paid for the builder's apprenticeship, for he had never built a punt before, although he had asseverated that he had, and he learnt, at this young fellow's expense, how to build one.

The Colonel says that the best plan to get a good punt is to find an able gunner to give the hints, and a good inland carpenter to find the hands and tools.

Now, that is the first time I have heard of an inland carpenter being employed on such a job, and I certainly do not agree with the suggestion. Inland work and boatbuilding are two very different things, and I would rather have a boatwright to do the job, with the help of a professional gunner if

necessary (i.e., if the boatwright is not an able gunner himself), because when building a boat or a punt there are many little things which the regular builder will attend to as a matter of course; whereas they would escape the carpenter's notice, and the gunner, if he is not a builder himself, would not notice them either. Thus I remember a punt being built once for a friend of mine according to the Colonel's view. The model was excellent, but the punt leaked like a basket, and she had to be sent to a yard to be caulked all over again ere she could be resorted to, and then they knocked her about so, that she never was of much account.

The best plan according to my opinion is to commission a regular punt builder, agree with him for a certain sum, and pay after due trial—that is, when nothing is known of the builder. A still better plan would be to buy ready-made punts. Unfortunately no builder has, hitherto, thought fit to have a few punts ready for sale. New ones, I mean, for second-hand ones are, generally speaking, patched up, and are rarely to be depended upon, except in extraordinary circumstances, simply because a good punt soon acquires a name in an estuary, and if ever she gets into the market she is eagerly snapped up by those "in the swim," whereas a bad one will knock about for years before she can find a new owner.

New ones, however, ready for launching, would be most tempting to intending buyers, since they could, on the spot, try them, and buy them right out. Now, for years, I have not heard of any builder going in for that line, until I heard the other day that Mr. John Howard, boat builder, at Maldon, Essex, had one or two punts for sale, ready for launching. I have not seen his handiwork yet. I was going to Maldon partly to see it and also for a punting trip down the Blackwater, but a puntsman wrote me that it was impossible to go out, on account of the ice being so thick on the river. So I did not go, and thereby lost for a time the chance of seeing Mr. Howard's punts. I, however, intend running down to Maldon by and bye, and will then inspect them.

A friend also tells me that Mr. Joseph Wendon, of Goldhanger, near Maldon, is a reliable punt builder. I have never

seen or tried his punts personally, but I have every reason to believe the genuineness of the information, which may prove of use to intending punters.

It is always a mistake to have narrow punts, because—firstly, they are dangerous ; secondly, they draw comparatively too much water. A heavy man in a narrow punt has to be exceedingly guarded in all his movements, for, as sure as fate, if he commits himself, he will upset the craft. It is far better in every way to have the punt built with as much beam as is compatible with the work she is intended to perform, by which means she will be stiff, and will also enable the shooter to get much nearer to his bird ; since, if she draws an inch or so less than a narrow punt, sometimes many yards can thus be gained on the fowl, whereas the narrow deep punt would have stuck out of range. On the other hand, extremes must be avoided. It would not do to have the punt as broad as she is long, for then she would labour in a sea, and would be very awkward to work.

Now, there are strong partisans of the sculling plan who object to paddling *in toto* ; but this, I think, is a mistake. In daytime, when one's eyes can be relied upon exclusively, sculling is greatly to be preferred, especially at sea and in deep water, where but little progress can be made with the paddle ; but at night, and in shallow and narrow estuaries, paddling is better, because the ear has to be, to a great extent, relied upon, and the paddles can work the punt anywhere, without any perceptible motion, however slight, and the utmost silence can thus be preserved. On the other hand, sculling is far less tiring, and a great deal more speedy than paddling ; and, on the whole, I think a good deal might be said *pro* and *con* each way of working to the fowl. Sculling, for one thing, is infinitely more comfortable work ; but I have shown that there are cases when paddling will give a chance to score when sculling would not answer, and *vice versâ*. The two styles, however, to some extent, require a different sort of craft. Thus, a punt which is exclusively paddled, must necessarily be somewhat narrow, else how could the puntsman work the paddles ? whereas an

exclusively sculled punt may be built any width almost, in fact, the more beam the better, as the beam will counteract the tendency to roll which is imparted to all craft when they are sculled powerfully. The best position for sculling a single-handed punt when the gunner is in expectation of shortly finding fowl, or is actually sculling to them, is to lie down on his left side, resting on his left elbow, and facing the gun, which he can regulate with his left hand as he goes along, if need be. The scull meanwhile is worked over the starboard side in a little crutch, and is thus invisible to the fowl, since the for'ard bulwarks hide it, as well as the gunner's hand. Hence in daytime sculling is preferable whenever convenient, if only for the reason that the fowl can detect no motion on board the craft. At night, however, the matter is not of so much consequence, as the darkness and the shadow of the banks protect the gunner's motions. When ready to fire—when sculling I mean—the scull should be brought in, and laid on the deck gently; for if its blade should be allowed to hang down into the water it will slew the punt round, and disturb the shot. And if the scull be allowed to thus hang without being in some way secured to the punt, it might get lost by dropping overboard, and its splash would also be undesirable. Therefore it should invariably be brought up, and when the gun is fired it is handy, since the gunner has only to shove it down the crutch again, and he is ready at once.

In double-handed punts, sculling alone is generally resorted to, because the shooter occupies the forepart of the punt to attend to the gun; and his man, lying down astern, can only scull, and that he can do over whichever side he likes (starboard almost universally); but it should be always impressed upon him (whenever the gun is "set"), that he must not alter his original position at the time of firing, otherwise the shot will go too high or too low, according as to whether he has brought the weight of his body too far in, or too far astern, in the punt. The sizes of the sculls depend entirely upon the sizes of the punts. They should be, however, very light, though strong, and

painted white like the punt; and their crutches, also painted white, should be muffled with whit leather.

Sometimes, when a long distance has to be worked to fowl, not only does the man scull with all his might, but the shooter helps him with two paddles, if the boat is narrow enough for him to do so, but that is very rarely the case. Generally speaking, modern double-handed punts are too wide to allow of any paddling, and all the work, therefore, falls upon the sculler. If, however, he knows how to scull, and is endowed with a tolerable amount of strength, he experiences but little difficulty in performing his duties. Some men will scull a boat almost as fast as if she were rowed. That sort of very fast work, however, is only allowable, or possible, in fact, when the fowl are a long distance off. For near work, the greatest caution and silence are necessary. "Slow but sure," then, ought to be the sculler's motto.

For paddling an ordinary single-handed punt, the paddles should be not more than thirty inches long. The blades should be flat, 4in. wide, and they should extend all the way up to 6in. of the top, where the handle is formed by rounding the wood, and sometimes splicing it with cord, so as to give the paddler a good grip of them. A hole is then bored through the very top of the handles, and through these holes a cord, in length a little above the width of the punt, is passed. By these means, when the paddler is near the birds, he gently lets go his paddles, which float alongside the punt, and are ready then to be picked up as soon as the shot is fired. It would be desirable to keep the handles of these paddles dry, but it is almost impossible to do so. Once I tried a pair of paddles with a cord and secured by a knot at each end only a few inches longer than the beam of the punt, and, by boring the holes at top of handles perpendicularly to the blades, I flattered myself that when the paddles were dropped the blades would simply cut through the water with the way on the punt, and the handles would have been kept dry—and all this happened right enough as long as there was any way on, after which the blades laid flat, and one of the paddles

dropped in the water. Besides this, the shortness of the cord, again, interfered with my shoving easily, or paddling. Hence my advice to wear kid or skin gloves, especially when any paddling has to be performed, for it is impossible to prevent the paddles, and therefore the hands, from getting wet.

The paddle blades are generally slightly forked at bottom ; but this is not absolutely necessary, and in fact the forks soon wear out when a good deal of punting over sandy shallows is performed, for the paddles then are used to shove along the punt, just as ice prongs are used for shoving the ice sledge or a punt on the ice, but with this difference, that whereas when paddling the recovery of the paddles, which must be done, is performed by simply bending the wrist, so as to cut through the water with the blades and make no splashing or noise—when the shallows can be felt, the paddles should be held with the blades parallel to the sides of the punt, and thus both hands go forward as far as they can ; the paddles are stuck in the sandy mud, and by exerting one's strength the punt is forced ahead. This will answer well whenever the ground is tolerably hard ; but over some very soft saltings, if the blades are used as just described, a good deal of time and labour is thrown away, because the soft mud gives no resistance, and thus hardly any progress is made. In such a case the punter soon feels how matters stand, and when he finds that the paddles cut through the mud then he should use them as though he were actually paddling in the ordinary way, *i.e.*, recover the paddles noiselessly, dab their points into the mud, and pull as though he were only dealing with water. All this requires practice, particularly if a strong tide be on at the time, for then the left or the right paddle under the lee might get under the punt ; and, if the paddle string snaps, the puntsman will have to go in chase of one at least of his paddles. That chase would not, however, be of much consequence intrinsically ; but what would be of far more importance would be the probable loss of that particular shot to the sportsman.

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grasp them without any straining of the fingers. Small handles for a big-fisted man are a mistake, and *vice versa*; big ones for a small man tire him out. White pine is perhaps the best all-round material, but I found that a strip of copper sheeting at the bottom materially preserved the blades, and assisted the puntsman in sinking the paddles for work. This, however, is not very usually resorted to, and sundry materials are used to make the paddles. Oak is very heavy, unless the paddles are artistically made. They, however, stand rough work in ice, &c., admirably. Speaking about ice reminds me of the precautions which should be taken when a good many floes are about. First, no elm-sided punt (unless protected with copper from stem to stern along the water-line, if not even up to the decks) should be taken out in such hard times, because the punt, if unprotected, would certainly be cut, or staved in, or even crushed, if caught amongst heavy drift ice floes. The most critical time for such a punt is not so much when the ice is coming down at speed with the ebb-tide, because if a good look-out is kept, and the ice-hook is handy, no harm is done; but it is at slack water, either low or high tide, if the frost is very severe and the floes are thick and numerous, that a general smash up is to be dreaded, because, if such a frail craft as a gunning punt should be held fast by an accumulation of floes, it will go like a band-box under their pressure; indeed, this is one of the chief dangers of punting in very cold weather, so much so that whenever the punts are "bare" the professionals rarely venture out then—that is, those whose crafts are not strong enough or coppered to stand the brunt of such work. It is usual, then, to keep the punt going in mid-channel as fast as possible out of the way of ice; but should a block occur, then Heaven preserve the punter if he is far from land, and no one is near at hand with the means of rescue. Therefore, the puntsman should do everything in his power to avoid being "stuck." Some men carry axes, with which they cut out a way for their craft. Mr. Booth's puntsmen invariably do so; once he had to fire the big gun to get off. The concussion released the punt, and they escaped, but the punt must have been well protected

in her bottom and sides, and stoutly timbered too ; had she not been so, the proceeding would have been little short of suicidal, since it would probably have driven the ice into, and perhaps through, the stern or bottom of the craft.

Cutting the ice with an axe requires quick and very careful management. The ice should be struck in a line six inches from, and along one side only of the punt, and this should be done quickly. Once a line is thus "marked" along the craft, the whole readily gives way, and with a little labour an outlet is soon managed. If ice is known to accumulate at the landing stage, a rope should be thrown ashore, or from shore to the punt, and the punt should be hauled bodily over the ice ; but care should be taken to unload the guns (if they are breechloaders), or to remove the caps or tubes of the muzzle-loaders, either punt guns or cripple guns, when all this is going on, for the jolting is unmerciful, and many accidents, fatal and otherwise, have occurred through the puntsmen having neglected these precautions. I have never myself seen a punt gun doing this damage ; but I saw once a punt, through the stem of which the charge of a cripple gun made a clean breach. The puntsman's brother had met him at the "hard," where about thirty yards of solid ice had formed. He threw him a rope ; the puntsman fastened it to the stern ring, and "Haul away, John," said he.

And John did ; whilst the puntsman helped by lifting up the stern with his paddles. Over the ice the stern went, and down went the stem. The cripple gun, nothing loth, slid along the floor, when a sudden jerk sent the hammer down, and bang went an ounce odd of shot through the stem.

"What are you up to ?" said the brother.

"Why, if you don't haul her up quickly," replied the other fellow, "I shall go to the bottom ; for there is a hole through her planking—that's what I am up to ! The cripple gun has crippled the punt !"

"More fool you to leave the gun at full cock !" growled the brother.

And I said "Amen ;" to that ; for the load might have killed someone, as well as sunk the punt.

There are many instances of accidents occurring through this extraordinary habit (engendered by idleness, no doubt), of leaving the guns in the punt, whilst the punt is being hauled up a "hard." Let anyone interested in the matter watch puntsmen returning from a trip, and he will be surprised at the gross carelessness they almost invariably display. Of course, there are some among them who have been taught, probably by hard experience, that it is neither wise nor safe to knock loaded guns about. Would anyone, for instance, think of dragging a box on a "hard," knowing that two guns (one capable of killing fifty men perhaps) were lying in that box, fully loaded? Certainly not. Well, then is not a punt like a box? Why should not the same precautions be adopted for both cases? The fact is, the men don't like the trouble, and rarely take it, unless eventually hard facts come to impress upon their minds the extreme desirability of doing so.

Respecting the best form of punt, to my mind, nothing can compare to one with fair beam, decked forward and all round, and bulwarks all round, rising from 2in. astern to 4in. forward. In such a craft, if the materials are strong, and the punt not old, and has been hitherto fairly used, one is as safe as in a man-of-war—and a great deal more so, perhaps. *Vide* the Vanguard, &c. When going into rough water it will be well to put on the little stem. This is a piece of wood forming part of the bulwarks forward, fitting exactly that portion which is cut away to make room for the gun barrel. When a sea is on, the little stem is put up; thus the barrel is raised at a considerable degree, no spray can get into it, and no sea can get into the punt—an end to be devoutly wished for.

I bear in mind once at Poole, when right in the midst of the harbour, a breeze sprang up, and the sea got rather unruly.

"I would put up the little stem if I were you, sir," said my puntsman.

"Oh, it is all right," replied I; "it is a nuisance you know to have to shift the gun. Besides, the sea will soon go down again."

And, saying these memorable words. I just squinted along the gun to look ahead, when a regular "creeper" swept over the deck; and ere I could even wink I got my mouth and my neck full of sea water, and was in consequence thereof very uncomfortable for the rest of the day. With the "second bow" on, one is as comfortable and as safe as can be from anything but a downright gale and storm; in which case, tracks for land are to be made with all speed.

If a wildfowl shooter can spare the time, and is lucky enough to meet with a builder who does really understand what a punt should be like, he (the shooter) should simply give his order, send the gun he intends using in the new punt to the building yard, and he himself should attend now and then, not only to see how the punt is progressing, but to assist by getting into her, so as to try the trim of the craft before she is decked and the gun is placed into position.

The best time for building would be May, June, or July, by which means the shooter will be fully equipped, and his craft somewhat seasoned, by the time the shooting season would begin again. A builder should always have at hand a couple of old punts, good models—one a double-handed and the other a single-handed—wherein to rig out, roughly, the guns sent him, and by getting the shooter and his man in the double-handed craft, for instance, he readily gets an idea as to whether a copy of his old punt will about do, or whether the new craft should have more beam or more length—all this, of course, according to the weight and length of the gun and the weight of the two men. And the same holds good also with a single-handed punt. Again, when laying the plan of the new craft, consideration must be paid as to whether the gun is to be worked with a rope breeching (in which case the stem should be provided for, as I have already described) or with a recoil spring, when a proper block should be rigged to the floor, which must be strong, and still strengthened by side pieces; or when a fixed swivel, without any spring, is to be used, a still stronger knee or block should be so secured to a stout bottom-board that no accident could occur as far as foresight can prevent, and to all this I have alluded before.

Now all these various plans require a different style of building for the punt.

With a simple rope-breeching, the punt will be much lighter forward than if the gun worked on a swivel and knee or block, or with a steel recoil spring; therefore everything of the sort should be taken into consideration. Moreover, a punt which has hitherto been used with a gun worked with a rope-breeching is quite unfit to be rigged with a knee. The bottom board would give way, to a certainty. Whereas a punt which has successfully stood the brunt of a fixed gun, or one fired even with a recoil spring, will take a much heavier gun comparatively, if a rope-breeching is afterwards adopted; but the trim of the boat must be preserved throughout, of course, if the gun is "set." From all this it is perfectly clear that the desirability of securing a competent builder is paramount. To order a punt from a man who has never built one is a waste of money—in fact, one pays for his apprenticeship, and one gets for his pains a "tub."

As to the advisability of using single-handed punts in preference to double-handed ones, this holds true in some cases, and not in others. If a man punts in an estuary where a good deal of punting is systematically carried on, then he will stand a great deal more chance of scoring with a single-handed punt than he would with a double-handed one, and the reasons thereof are of too obvious a nature to need enlarging upon. But it should be borne in mind that punting is also carried on to an enormous extent in many wild, out-of-the-way places, where not more than one or two gunners enjoy the sport in each spot. All along the Scotch and Irish coasts this holds good. Many gentlemen, resident or otherwise, have favourite bays and estuaries, which are but little known to any gunners but themselves, and over which, practically, they "lord" supreme. Now, in such places, often with many miles of rowing or sailing before the "fowling" ground is reached, punting single-handed (though I admit that it would even there, or anywhere else, in fact, give more chances to score) would submit the gentlemen puntsmen to such hardships that it is questionable whether the excessively

hard labour would not more than counterbalance the prospects of sport. *Ergo*, such gentlemen are quite right in punting double-handed. I for one could never see the force of making myself needlessly miserable, or of transforming my sport into down-right hard work. At the same time, I will put up cheerfully with any hardships—nay, I will not even think of them—if sport is to be had only with hardships; but, as to exhausting myself when I can help it—well, all I can say is, I don't see it.

For instance, take game shooting. I know several fellows who go on all day without bite or sup, tramping, tramping, tramping until they are that fagged that they can't see out of their eyes, can't hold their guns straight if they do see the birds, and are so dispirited through sheer hunger, thirst, and fatigue that before two-thirds of the day are over they wish they were at home, and are sick of the business. Yet they can't account for all that sort of thing. I can. I am no such simpleton. I shoot, on an average now, two days a week throughout the season, and I take good care to have my lunch and drinks brought into the field. At one or two o'clock, according as hunger prompts me, I sit down in a sheltered nook, and enjoy my meal. That over, I start anew, like a giant refreshed. When I feel thirsty I drink, when hungry I eat; and, as a consequence thereof, I enjoy, not only my shooting—but my feeding and drinks, and altogether I am as happy as a king (bad simile, though, this nowadays, since kings are potted or rather shot at, almost daily); well, then, far happier than a king. Well, now, punting, single or double-handed, or any other sport, comes in the same category. Why not secure what comforts you can? If fowl are not to be had but by single-handed punting, by all means the single punt must be resorted to. But if your fowl are not much disturbed, or not at all, except by yourself, then I say go double-handed, and it will be far more pleasant; for, after all is said and done, a gentleman need not transform himself into a "nigger" for the sake of his sport, and since in quiet places he can kill plenty of fowl with a companion, he need not go alone. Single-handed punting is dreary work at times; double-handed



punting is *always* entertaining, if it were only for the companionship of another being. *Ergo*, in public waters much frequented by gunners, single-handed punts are preferable; but in comparatively quiet waters the double-handed craft will be far more comfortable, and will show quite sufficient sport to all intents and purposes. Therefore, I think that double-handed punts deserve quite as much consideration as single-handed, although "Punter" deprecates their use, and thinks they are hardly worth discussion. I have shown instances when they are almost exclusively used, and, in fact, most well-to-do gunners who live some distance from their almost preserved punting grounds, resort to double-handed punts. Mr. Booth, for instance, rarely punts alone, except in such cases as I have already pointed out. I am, however, pleased to see that "Punter" agrees with me as to the desirability of punt guns having long stocks coming well under the arm. All said and done, I privately fancy that style is the safest and best. When you have the stock close held between the side and arm you can turn the gun, or tilt it up with the greatest ease, and if everything were to give way—*i.e.*, rope or recoil spring, the gun would do very little, if any harm, as the pressure of the arm and the weight of the gunner would counteract whatever force might remain in the recoil after it had done the damage. Well, of course that is *my* view and that of "Punter," and of many more shooters no doubt; but we have also seen that many clever men resort to other plans, and are perfectly satisfied with them. "Of tastes and colours 'tis useless to discuss." I must, therefore, state things as they stand.

Respecting outriggers, whenever the subject is mentioned in "punting" company a fierce controversy is pretty sure to arise.

"I would not have outriggers to my punt," once a good gunner spoke forth; "in fact, I would as soon have a Union Jack flying. Give me good wooden throwls, and I am happy."

"Bother the wooden throwls!" then said another man. "One is perpetually dropping them overboard, or breaking them, or losing them, or forgetting their 'doubles' when one

starts. They are an unmitigated nuisance, to my mind. Now, fixed outriggers are always there—strong, reliable, steady, and handy; and that is a blessing.”

Now, “when doctors disagree,” &c. At the same time, a little discussion on the subject will do no harm. It cannot be denied that, unless the fixed outriggers are regular “skeleton rowlocks,” they are to be avoided, since clumsy rowlocks are a great deal too visible to be advisable. At the same time, it cannot be denied that the convenience of fixed rowlocks is very great; and, if they are slender and artistically made, I, for one, can see no reason why they should not be resorted to; and the best, according to my views, are those made according to Col. Hawker’s design, for a cut of which his work should be referred to. On the other hand, two couples of wooden thowls are very simple and unassuming; and, if the puntsman is careful, and ascertains at starting that they are all right, and always provides himself with two or three more than he requires, in case of a breakage or a loss overboard, &c., they are certainly cheap and handy things enough. The outriggers, however, for neatness and ease of rowing, carry the day, in my estimation. They are made of copper, in the form of an **A**, with the top brought down and rounded for the reception of the sculls. When they are being screwed down, the deck should be strengthened underneath with a piece of elm or oak, otherwise the slender deck would certainly never hold together under the strain which the rower will inflict on the craft. The thowls should always be muffled with whit leather, when the punt is required for actual fowling, so as to deaden the noise of the rowing, and also save the sculls.

In Col. Hawker’s book, page 411, of the eleventh edition, a bird’s-eye view is given of a punt seen end-on. In that cut the wash-streaks are shown slanting outwardly—which I consider a mistake. Of course, such streaks wash off a sea far better than upright ones, but their shadow is too conspicuous, and I object to them on that account. Upright wash-streaks practically answer quite as well in anything but a very strong sea, and they have the undoubted advantage of not being so visible by reason that they produce no shadow underneath, as

outwardly inclined streaks do. Everything above water should be as little shaded as possible; hence a well-sunk punt in daytime will get nearer to fowl than one which rides light because the shady sides of the sunken punt are nearly invisible. On the other hand, a sunken punt, it should not be forgotten, is dangerous when any sea is on; therefore, any trick tending to sink a punt lower than her usual swim should be only resorted to in remarkably fine weather. There was a man I knew once who managed at all times to get near his fowl when no one else could; and his dodge consisted in loading his deck with ice all round, so as to sink the punt, and at the same time disguise her. Again, some time ago a correspondent stated in the *Field*, anent punting:

I have no personal experience of this sport, but a friend of mine some years ago fitted his punt with mirrors on the outside of her bows. His idea was that the ripple of the water being reflected in the mirrors would cause the punt to be quite invisible to the birds. I have not seen him since, but I have heard the invention was a success. The suggestion may possible be worth a place in the correspondence on the subject.—  
JACKDAW.

Now, this plan would, precisely, avoid that shadow of the sides to which I am alluding; but the question is this: Has it been tried in all weathers and at all hours? It is obvious that, in hard weather, when ice floes are about, the mirrors would be smashed, besides many other circumstances which might lead, in the usual course of punting, to their also coming to grief; but, putting aside this, it strikes me that if the plan is feasible, as it appears to be, a better disguise for the sides of a punt could hardly be conceived.

Perhaps the punter himself, "Jackdaw's" friend, will eventually publish his experience on the subject.

Whenever heavy guns are used, rowing stern first, in either double or single-handed punts, is the universal rule. When light punt guns are resorted to, however, the reverse is generally the case. Thus, at Leigh, in Essex, for instance, I have often seen two or three puntsmen rowing together, Canvey Island way, and they invariably row stern first; but then, their punts and their punt guns are really of the smallest sorts,

hence the weight of the man more than counterbalance in the small craft the weight of his forty or thirty pounder, so that the punt swims true when rowed as any ordinary boat. With heavy guns, however, this would be—not impossible—but very awkward, as the punt is then too much by the head to be easily managed.

By the way, I forgot to mention that whenever the little stem is put on, and the gun consequently tilted up, it is sometimes held in that position by a stick which catches under the port and starboard sides, and which presses on the butt end of the gun, thus easing the weight of its barrel on the little stem. But this stick is apt to jump, and a belt is always more desirable.

The setting poles in modern use are generally three-pronged. Formerly double-pronged ones were all the "go." The three-pronged ones, however, have several advantages, one of which is that they are more readily used for shoving the punt along, as, no matter which way the pole reaches the bottom, it takes a good grip readily, and three prongs give more hold than two when the bottom is very soft; secondly, when pursuing cripples on the mud, the three-pronged pole gives better support to the fowler, and secures also a bird more readily than the old-fashioned one. These two systems, however, have each their very warm partisans; but, if my opinion were asked, I should certainly give first prize to three-pronged, and a commendation to the double-pronged instrument, the latter commendation simply on the principle of "never speaking ill of the bridge that carries you over;" and certainly I owe a debt of gratitude to one of the latter category, which in seasons gone by has stood me several times in good stead. But the new plan is incomparably the best. The prongs are secured to the shaft by a moderately heavy iron ring, which is sometimes supplemented by a leaden one, the latter only meant so as to increase the weight of the setting pole, thereby getting it down to the bottom more readily.

As regards sailing in an ordinary punt, it is sometimes advantageous to resort to it; but it should not be lost sight

of that there can be no attempt at beating to windward, as the boat, having no keel whatsoever (contrary to the sailing punt proper), drifts helplessly to leeward whenever anything of the sort is attempted. In short, sailing the ordinary punt cannot be done when the wind is on the bow or before the beam. It is only to be resorted to when the wind is astern, or very nearly so and not too much on the quarter either at any time; for the craft might capsize if the breeze got a bit fresh, and the mast held well. For this reason the mast should be very small, very slender, and should simply stand upright either through the scantling, if the gun is a heavy one, or abaft the scantling, if she is light. In the latter case, my plan was to make a square stepping hole on the bottom board, and to rig up a board with a hole, from side to side, just behind the scantling. Both these holes were a bit on the left of the butt end of the gun, so as to allow it free play, and permit me to aim. The mast itself was of my own make, and had no metal sheaves for the halyards. A simple hole at the top answered the purpose quite as well, and proved a saving: for I lost scores of masts, which broke for various reasons best known to themselves, and if I had had to fit up every one of them with new brass sheaves and travellers it would have been a continuous small drain on my exchequer. Now, I don't mind spending money when it is needed for business, or pleasure either; but I do not, by any means, hold with deliberate wasting, or with entailing unnecessary labour upon myself. Now, my system is as simple as A. B. C. Take a long broom-stick of sufficient respectability, square the bottom end, screw on two thumb-cleats to it, one on each side, fore and aft, just above the place which reaches the cross-board or the deck when the mast is shipped; bore a hole through the top, through that hole pull your halyards, now ship your mast, hoist on your sail, make fast your halyards to one of the afore-mentioned thumb-cleats; to the other thumb-cleat make the tack of your sail fast, draw your main-sheet through a thimble, or even a ring astern, and carry it back to you amidships, if you are single-handed; and there you are, rigged out cheaply and comfortably.

Those to whom the expense and trouble are of no consequence, can have everything in tip-top order, as though the craft were an ordinary sailing boat; but, as I have observed already, I think it a waste of money, on account of the frequent disasters which are bound to occur. Now, thereupon, some one may, and probably will, remark that such a thing as a mast going overboard never occurred to him, because he uses for his punt a man-of-war's mast, &c., &c. . . . Joking apart, I think it impossible for a man to do two things at once, and when you are being actually driven in to fowl, you can only look out ahead, and see if the gun covers them well. Meanwhile, the breeze may get boisterous, and a little too much for your craft, when crack! goes the mast; flap, flap! goes the sail, and lo! the lot is overboard on the sea.

Once the boom of my gun and the snapping of my mast occurred simultaneously; but my shot had been successful. So, as I heard the mast go, I apostrophised it thus: "Good job too! Go over, if you like, you beast!" At the same time, I could not help laughing at my thus addressing an inanimate broomstick as "a beast!" Such is human nature.

As regards sailing ordinary punts, the form of the sail varies according to the size of the punt and the requirements of the punter; but, without prejudicing other tastes, I may state that I have invariably made my best shots with a very low and smallish square sail, and I think that I may account for it theoretically by the fact that, by the fowl, a sailing boat's proximity is judged by the height of its sail. Thus a very high sail (as the full-sized lateen sail, used on board sailing punts proper undoubtedly is, since the lateen yard will generally measure from thirteen to sixteen feet in length) will sooner rise a flock than a low, square sail, like the one I advocate for an ordinary punt. I used to run up this sail on a gaff only some five feet long, and often stretched the sail to leeward by means of the setting pole when a fair stern wind was wafting me on. This, however, I repeat, for fear of any misunderstanding, was in an ordinary punt. The regular sailing punt will require a special description at my hands.

Of course, in whichever punt the fowler may be sailing, the tiller ropes should be long enough to be manipulated by him whilst lying by the gun.

On the subject of sailing punts, Col. Hawker remarks that when the birds are much used to gunning punts (i.e., when they are paddled or sculled), firing under sail from this kind of craft (a sailing punt) is a murderous recipe; "because," he says, "my punt, when under sail, at a fair shot from birds, appears like a large boat some hundred yards off. When others 'set' I sail, when others sail I 'set,' " &c.

Mr. Folkard also fully agrees with this latter view, and, in fact, everybody at all conversant with the subject must have noticed that such was the case. Beginners, however, naturally enough, are very loth of believing that the wary fowl will rather allow, under any circumstances, a sailing boat to get near them, than the much-lower-in-the-water sculled or paddled punt; but they must soon come to credit the evidence of their own senses when they find that sometimes no sculler or paddler can get near anything like range, whilst the sailing punt almost walks into the fowl. I have an idea that the fowl take the punt then for a harmless fishing boat, or else for a very far-off sailing boat of large dimensions, as the Colonel opines. Which of the two solutions is the correct one will for ever be a mystery, no doubt; but that the surmises are pretty correct I have no doubt—else how are we to account for the facts?

I may state *en passant*, as a case in point, that my last shot of the season, two years back, was in an ordinary single-handed punt, which I at first tried to paddle to a gaggle of Brent geese; but they would not let me get near them. Eventually, however, I sailed, there and then, to another gaggle in the same punt a mile further; and then I killed thirteen. This shows conclusively that sometimes the fowl will let you get near, even with a sail, when otherwise they will fight shy of any otherwise propelled craft. I have, besides this event, often found this to be the case; hence, I would always advise punters to resort, now and then, to sailing, when sculling or paddling does not answer; but they should keep

to leeward of the birds. That precaution should always be made a *sine quâ non* in all styles of pursuing wildfowl.

Colonel Hawker was very fond of sailing punts, and so am I, as one sees a good deal of fun in them, and their comforts are not to be sneezed at. The colonel shipped his mast on either side of the gun in little cylindrical holes bored out of a solid piece of elm, and, from the appearance of his mast, as shown in page 407 of his work, evidently he "went in" for something substantial; but this, I think, is a mistake. A punt is not a craft that can carry any amount of sail, or be used much in squally weather. Therefore, I think it by far preferable to have masts which will give way if a sudden pressure, dangerous for the safety of the gunner, should be put on the sail; and Mr. Folkard also states that this is much better. Indeed, in practice, there are but very few punts which carry substantial masts, and those which do so are built of great strength, and with great beam. Howbeit, the colonel takes care to explain in his book that the holes wherein to ship the mast should be kept waterproof; but he does not say how, or why. As regards "how," the cut opposite page 406 shows that wooden plugs are put in the holes when not in use, and this fills the gap in the author's explanations. But virtually it does not signify a rap, in open weather, whether the holes are stopped or not, for, supposing that they did fill with water—well, what then? A pint of water, more or less, does not much matter. In cold weather, however, the case is very different; for, should the mast-holes get filled with water, and the frost congeal it, why you are in a fix when you want to ship your mast, since the ice must first be cleared out of the hole, a tedious and uncertain job this, as, unless the punter is provided with a sharp iron rod of sufficient length, he can hardly expect to clear the hole of its ice. Moreover, the knocking and digging about are apt to spoil that part of the scantling wherein the tops of the blocks are fixed. Consequently it will be well, in winter time at any rate, to always keep the holes plugged, so that no water gets in. This will avoid a good deal of bother, however unimportant the precaution may be in mild weather. However, all mast holes are not necessarily made



through solid blocks of wood. Neither are they all running through the scantling. This position varies according to the weight of the gun, and that of the puntsman (and of his man, if he goes double-handed).

Now, a sailing punt proper is built outwardly, to some extent, pretty much like a sculling punt, but her proportions and the form of her bottom are different. To begin with—were not some sort of keel provided, the punt would not sail well at all, and, in order to effect this end, a keelson should be fitted to the punt. Its dimensions should vary with the size and stability of the craft. If a slender man, who “paddles,” uses a somewhat narrow punt (which he is obliged to do, since, if she were wide, he could not paddle), then it would be a mistake to have a heavy keelson put on his punt, because she would be dangerous. In such a case, the keelson should be about 2½ in. astern, tapering to nearly nothing at stem. But a stiff, broad-beamed punt will advantageously take a keelson of 3½ in. aft and 1 in. forward. Indeed, I have seen a punt with 4 in. aft and 1½ in. at stem; but she carried a gun of 180 lb. or 140 lb. weight, and two heavy men, and she was built so as to stand as much work as a whale boat pretty well.

“A single-handed sailing punt,” according to Mr. Folkard, “should not exceed 18 ft. long, if she is intended also for rowing and paddling, and her extreme breadth amidships should be 3 ft. 3 in. The stem and stern pieces should be upright. Depth forward 4½ in. to 6 in., and aft 8 in.; keelson 3 in. at stern, and gradually lessening to 1 in. at the bows. The sides of the punt should be rounded, and the quarter rather full.”

Now, if ordinary paddling or sculling punts do tax ordinary boat builders’ ingenuity, the *acme* of trouble is reached when one wishes to build a punt that will both row, paddle, scull, and sail. I have seen scores of punts which were supposed to have been built according to Mr. Folkard’s above-given excellent measurements; but I can safely say that, though the dimensions given were alike, or nearly so, there were hardly three of the punts that looked alike, and there are, really, very few sailing punts that are at all to be trusted for handiness and sea-

worthiness, or praised for their lines. For this, however, the puntsmen are to some extent to blame. A sailing punt intended for an amateur should be built quite as artistically as a nobleman's sailing boat; the best workmanship and materials alone should be resorted to; the craft should be finished as if intended for exhibition; no iron should enter into her composition; wrought copper nails, sculling crutches, and rowlocks should be provided; and, in short, the punt should be turned out in the very best style that the craft can produce.

Now, this cannot be done if the *£ s. d.* question is made paramount. On the other hand, I would not advise rushing to the other extreme; but it should be remembered that a finished sailing punt is really a first-rate pleasure boat, and not a "tub," and therefore that the liberality which is usually displayed when men have pleasure craft built should be extended to such a useful, and at the same time pleasurable boat, as a sailing punt is intended to be.

Now, to give an instance in point. I know a man who used to keep two or three outriggers on the river, and a couple of punts at certain fowling quarters. Now, his outriggers, in which he during the summer exhibited his manly form to the admiring fair sex, were simply gems of the first water, and cost no end of money. Had they been built of silver and gold they could hardly have been more costly. Why, because the public could see these boats, and he accordingly took a pride in them. Now, that very same man's punts were, to put it mildly, quite unworthy of his purse. Why, because he thought that anything would do among the seafaring population. Now I do not hold with that sort of view at all. I would rather have a fowling craft which would be an object of admiration to sailors and professional gunners, than make an exhibition of myself, in flannels, to a lot of people who understand about as much about a boat as an Esquimaux dog about field trials. *Ergo*, as much pride should be taken by a puntsman in his punt as a hunting man would take in his horses. Surely a craft which holds your life at its mercy is well worthy of your consideration; therefore, there should be no

niggardliness exhibited towards the builders. A fair price should be accordingly given, and then far better crafts would be turned out than many of those that are now resorted to.

Mr. Folkard says : " Neither water decks nor wash streaks are required for the sailing punt, because no reasonable man would venture to set sail in so frail a bark in rough water." Probably not ; but does it not occur to the eminent author that a man may be taken unawares when out to fowl, in which case he would feel a great deal safer with both decks and streaks. I should not care to go in any punt that was not thus built, myself ; because, although the weather may be settled when you start, there is no knowing how it may turn before you get back.

As regards the mast, it should not be more than 5ft. high ; and, as before pointed out, it should not be a stout mast either, it being far preferable to lose fifty masts than to get an " upset " once. As regards the fittings of the mast, what I stated on the subject, when sailing an ordinary punt, will hold good now ; but, anyone wishing to do things in tip-top style, even for the mast, which is, however, a most perishable sort of article—or should be if it is not—then the said mast should have a brass sheave at the top for the halyards, and a copper traveller to go up and down the mast, and either one or two thumb-cleats should be screwed at that part of the mast which is just above the scantling ; one of the cleats to make the halyards fast to, and to the other one the tack of the sail should be secured. If, however, the keelson of the punt is high, and the punt is a good, stable, and fair-sailing one, then the tack should be made fast to a ring two or three feet in front of the mast—in fact, as far as one can reach from midships ; by which means the one sail used on the punt will act like two—*i.e.*, a mainsail and a foresail ; but for each tack—when a punt is thus rigged—the mast and sail must be shifted, of course. When I was on a long reach I often used to secure the tack of the sail thus forward, and also by means of a bit of cord like a reef-knittle, rigged on a small brass eye like a reef-cringle, placed at the bottom of the sail, just where the sail was in a line with the mast when set, I used to make

fast that knittle to the second thumb-cleat on the mast, and thus, to all intents and purposes, my single sail was a double one; but unless your punt has a somewhat heavy keel, it is useless to try on that sort of thing, as the punt otherwise drops to leeward so fearfully if there be no keel to make her stiff. White calico is, according to my opinion, the best stuff to make your sail of, as it is very light, and does not make her top-heavy. The lateen yard should be not more than 12ft. —at least that is my fancy, but there are some used that are 16ft. long. This, however, I do believe to be a mistake, because—(1) carrying so much sail is unnecessary; (2) the sail is too high, and, therefore, too conspicuous to the fowl—but of course I dare say my views will not be indorsed by all. The main sheet should be let through a sheave at the stern, and made fast to a thumb-cleat close to the punter's head, so that at all times he may have the sail under control, and ease her if required. The tiller ropes should also reach up to the scantling almost, so as to be always at hand; and, thus provided, the punter, without moving or showing himself, can manage his craft to perfection.

And now a few more words about sailing punts. My notes hitherto concerned punts actually being sailed to fowl; and, as long as the sea is smooth, the punt may be sailed gun forward, as described, without any apprehension. Should, however, the wind rise, and the sea get unruly, it will be found very dangerous to carry on sail as described, and not only dangerous but useless, and I will show it. Firstly, the tendency of the heavily-loaded bows is to go under in any sea—hence the danger. As to the uselessness of the attempt, it is perfectly patent to anyone who will take the trouble to consider the question. When a craft is riding but a few inches above the sea, what can its gun do on the fowl if a chopping sea is on?—nothing. If you fire you fire into the waves, and you might just as well save your ammunition for more suitable weather, unless you resort to a craft riding high, which may give you some command over the birds. Of course, I know that it is very tempting to try with the punt when one chances to be out, and meeting many birds; but I have seen it done,

and have tried it myself, to no purpose. Incredible as it may appear, once, however, I had a very queer shot at the mouth of the Blackwater. I was going back to the yacht, the weather looking bad, and getting worse, when I saw about half a score of widgeon, just about eighty yards from me. There they were, bobbing on the waves, up and down, up and down, heading the wind, and not minding me. To sight and to fire was the work of a moment; but, owing to the intervening waves, the widgeon did not see the flash, hence did not rise, and so escaped, as the waves got the whole charge pretty nearly into them. But what was my astonishment whilst watching the birds go, to see, about sixty yards beyond them, another bunch also rising, and one of the latter actually dropping down again! Evidently, some of my shot had flown past the lot I was aiming at, and dropped on those further on, with the effect of disabling one (which, of course, I got with a shot from my "cripple stopper").

But, to resume about punting in squally weather, I would urge upon amateurs to invariably give up looking for shots whenever the sea gets unruly; and, in order to make matters doubly safe, I would advise them to have their punts so prepared as to sail either stem or stern first, as occasion requires. In this case, as the rudder cannot be used, a scull should be resorted to. The punter should sit amidships with his back towards the gun, and guide the punt with the scull. Now it will be found that by this plan a punt which, when sailed stem first, laboured most dreadfully and dangerously in a sea, now skims along like a sea bird over the waves. Why this change? Why, precisely because, instead of weighing her bows down under the waves when driving her forward under sail, as she was previously when the end carrying the gun was ahead, now her stern rises to the waves, and the puntsman's body, together with the weight of his gun, act as properly placed ballast. The puntsman, however, should not overdo the thing, especially if his gun is a particularly heavy one, as in that case, if he sat quite aft, near the gun, the stern would be so light and high as to almost topple the concern backwards. He should then draw the gun inboard, make it fast, and sit himself as far forward

as his knowledge of the trim of his craft will suggest. A variation of a foot or so makes a great difference in the punt's sailing; and, when properly managed, instead of a heavy craft, lumbering in the trough of the sea, one finds himself in a buoyant, trim little boat, as dry and as sound as a cork, which takes you home with speed and safety combined. It will be well, I repeat it, when sailing thus, with a heavy gun behind one in squally weather, to secure her safely, because, if she rolled about at a critical moment, she might cause a serious mishap. It is also advisable to hold the sheet in one's hand, and ease the sail whenever desirable, or even let it go altogether if the squall is bad; this can then easily be done, because one has only to attend to the craft, the gun being out of the question altogether. The main point, however, is trimming the punt accurately, so that she should have every advantage in her favour. When the sea is bad a waterproof cover over the punt, in the style of an Esquimaux boat, would be desirable. Col. Hawker tried the plan, and recommended it; but very few punts are rigged thus, although the convenience is undeniable if one is caught by bad weather when out punting a long distance from home. To resume, then, about punt sailing. In smooth water sail gun first, making the sheet fast, and hold the rudder lines. In bad, squally weather, get the gun inboard, make her fast, sail stern first, hold the sheet, and use a scull as rudder.

In rough weather the puntsman should be very guarded in his motions when his craft is under sail. He should sit, to begin with, right in the middle of his craft, and not lean so much to windward, as he would in a heavier craft, because the punt has not sufficient beam to warrant liberties being taken with her trim. If one sits to windward, of course she will sail better as long as the breeze holds on; but, the moment the wind drops, under goes the weather gunwale, and one may ship a sea. Whereas, by sitting right in the middle, one may move his body according to the punt's motions without changing his seat; indeed, this is done spontaneously without the punter being aware of it, and the punt remains safe. As to moving backward and forward in the punt, it is advisable

to do as little of that sort of thing as possible. Once the mast is shipped and the sail trimmed, sit down quietly in your allotted part of the punt, and be watchful. If the weather gets really bad, down with mast and sail, take to your oars, and row her, stern first, under the lee of the shore for shelter from the storm.

It is curious to note that neither Col. Hawker nor Mr. Folkard mention at all the sailing of punts stern first; at least, I do not remember their having done so. If they have, I will stand corrected. The advisability of the dodge is, however, so obvious, that all punts which are ever sailed should be fitted fore and aft with stepping holes, or some other arrangements should be prepared whereby to ship the mast readily, either for'ard or aft, as occasion requires. Again, if rowing is resorted to for a long distance, and when fowl are not likely to be met with, it will be found that a punt will row much easier stern first, particularly if she carries a heavy gun in her bow, and this is alluded to by the authors just mentioned.

Mr. Folkard labours, with many other single-handed puntsmen, under the idea that double-handed punts are out of the question for punting; for, in relation to sailing punts proper, he particularly observes: "The sailing punt is intended to carry one person only, as having two occupants of a punt is *at all times*" (the italics are mine) "a great impediment to success in wildfowl shooting." From whence I must conclude that Mr. Folkard never chose to try double-handed punting—though why, 'tis hard to tell, as I, and many more, greatly prefer it, and certainly get therefrom quite as much sport as from single-handed craft, when the affair is properly carried out.

As to sailing punts carrying only one person—as a matter of fact, there are but very few double-handed punts that are not provided with all necessaries for sailing.

Some men, when rowing their punts, rest their feet anyhow against the ribs, or streaks, of their craft. Nothing could be worse. It wears both the timbers, the streaks, and the sides,

and does not give any very good support. A stretcher is always handy, and eases the labour considerably. It, moreover, does not take much room to stow away when not wanted, and it saves the punt from being rendered unsightly by the scraping of the boots and their nails. Therefore, punts should be provided with stretchers.

When actually sailing to fowl in a double-handed punt, the shooter and his man should stick to previously-agreed-upon spots in the punt, if the shooter is using a "set" gun, otherwise the gun will not be true. If both men are too far aft, the gun is too high, and *vice versâ*—and, of course, every shot depends in that case upon the trim of the boat. When, however, only sailing about in search of fowl, but not actually up to any, both occupants of the punt, if she is sailed stem first, should go as far astern as possible, so as to prevent her from going head under, or griping; and the gun may be left on its "set," since, although her muzzle will be high then, she will be right enough when the shooter and his man will resume, when at close quarters with the fowl, their shooting stations.

Col. Hawker says that a very large old umbrella, fitted up with brown holland, waterproofed, is the greatest possible comfort and shelter to those who go about in a punt.

I have not the slightest doubt about that. Everyone knows how cosy one feels when a cold blast is blowing down an estuary to get anywhere sheltered from it, if only for a few minutes; indeed, in very hard weather, I have often laid down in the punt to windward, just to get that very shelter; but I have never tried an umbrella in a punt (indeed, I never carry one even in the streets, and never did in my life), so I cannot say what its effects would be; but I guess readily that it must be comfortable enough to the punter—but what about the fowl? Do they like umbrellas? Most likely not, in which case they should be first educated to like them.

As regards shelter from the cold wind, nothing answers better in a permanent manner than the hood. When the



frost is severe, and the wind accordingly cutting, draw on your hood, and keep it on, turn your back to the wind, and you will keep warm for hours.

Further on the gallant colonel said: "Moreover, the umbrella makes a capital mizen sail when going before the wind, and is a complete shield to you and your man from the shaking of a wet dog," &c. . . . "All of which was very plausible in his time, but now an umbrella used as a sail in a punt would be voted *de trop*, and a dog is a recognised nuisance in a punt.

The colonel, however, gives standard advice as to building punts, and his drawings and measurements, probably, will never be in the main points improved upon. On one subject he dwells strongly, and that is about providing air-tight compartments in punts, and he is, as usual, quite right. That all punts should be made on the lifeboat principle is so self-evident that the necessity therefor needs no enlarging upon; but, so far, there are but very few punts so built—the more the pity.

Actual attempted fowling in a punt (especially a sailing punt), if the shooter goes alone and is inexperienced, is a waste of time. Even a paddled punt (the easiest of all to work) is very awkward to manage without good previous practice. Let the tyro be given all requisites, and start without being taught and trained, and, although he may have a first-rate boat and an A 1 gun, with irreproachable ammunition, he will not kill a single bird—except by a fluke.

Now, people who have never handled a punt or a punt gun are pretty sure to smile at this, because they think that nothing could be easier—in *their* estimation—than to knock over a cloud of fowl at each discharge of the ponderous weapon. In fact, launch your punt, shut your eyes, strike the trigger, and you must be bound to kill something—is their creed. *But they should just try it.* Now, supposing the tyro at last sees fowl, and admitting that he gets within range, the chances are great that the moment he lets go his right paddle to strike the trigger, he will slew the punt round unwittingly with his

left paddle; and his shot, which, if properly discharged, should have cut a lane in the flock, will miss them altogether, or perhaps just hit an unlucky outside bird who was doomed to die by accident—and so on, and so forth. The mishaps that occur to beginners are numberless, and quite vexatious no doubt; but then it should be admitted that an apprenticeship is desirable in all things; and why punting should be excluded from the list, beats, as the Yankee expressed it, “this ’ere child into fits.”

Yes, sirs, I have known men who had never been in a punt in their lives boldly volunteering on a trip on their own hook. They had read all about it, therefore they knew all about it, and they went, with dire results. Wet to the skin, with raws innumerable, and legions of blisters—probably a strained punt, lots of things lost, &c. . . . dreadful was the tale of woe. But what else could have been expected? Now, the first thing a man should do who wishes to go in for punting should be to learn the management of the punt. Let him practice in May and June, in a part of the estuary where no birds are about. He should work up to an imaginary flock, represented, say, by a strip of saltings just yet above the tide, and he should paddle, or scull, or pole, or sail, and bring up his punt to the saltings in question with all possible care and precision, and fire at it—keeping his eyes on it so as to mark what effect his shot would have had on birds. Nothing is easier, if he keeps his head to windward of the gun, as he will readily then see where the shot strikes on the mud flat and on the brine beyond. When a man can readily bring up his craft and deliver his fire true, then he may think of joining the select army of wildfowl shooters, but not till then; and the learning tyro will find it no easy task at first, when, say, in a sailing punt, although he may have to deal only with a shingle or saltings, and is cool and deliberate then about the matter. What, then, would have been his feelings had he found himself, without previous training and drilling, face to face with a flock of widgeon?

Now, no man thinks of even using a shoulder gun without trying it, handling it, and getting used to it. Yet, some men

will take up punting without any previous knowledge of how to handle their craft and use the punt gun, and they expect success ! It is absurd. Of course firing charges at a saltings appears to be a waste of ammunition, but it is not. It is a necessary expenditure ; one must pay to learn, even at school ; and certainly I can see no saving in a man declining to practice at a mark and going on a trip and missing every shot. Where is the saving then ?

I would, therefore, recommend to all intending punters a thorough apprenticeship of the craft. Learn how to row, to scull, to paddle, to pole, and to sail ; then learn how to shoot the big gun, no matter how clever you may be on land with a shoulder gun.

Before bringing this chapter to an end, I must give "Cigarette's" views on its subjects. His letter ran thus :

Let me add my ideas concerning a sail for a punt, and describe what I have always used with success and safety, as an addition to my last note. A sail, to be right and safe for a punt, should be so made that, figuratively speaking, it may be shipped and unshipped between your finger and thumb. No fastenings, cleats, rings, and gew-gaws of that kind, to my mind, should ever be used ; you might as well have flag halyards and lightning conductor at once. "Punter's" spritsail is very good ; but if he wants something even quicker and handier still, let him procure a leg-of-mutton sail, with a boom lashed on, one end made fast to extremity of sail, the other end with a small jaw so fixed as to swing on the mast. From end to boom a main sheet of light rope. On this rope let there be knots a foot or so apart.

Now for fastening main sheet. I condemn all hooks, cleats, and such things, as liable to stick just at the very moment your life may depend on letting all free. Instead, let there be a small slit some inch or so in depth, cut downwards in the combing of the punt in a convenient place ; at the end of the slit a hole bored a little smaller than the knots on the rope. You can then make your main sheet fast in a moment, or, what is better still, let go in a moment also. The knots allow you to let in or out your boom according to wind.

My mast is some ten feet high, my boom about eight feet long ; and I can take the two spars in my hands and set sail, or take in everything, in about five seconds.

One word about working a punt with a screw propeller. I rigged up a punt once in such a manner. I found, however, insurmountable difficulties in the way. Any boat or punt worked by a propeller must of necessity have the shaft thereof along the floor or bottom boards. A punt, of course, to be useful, must draw only two or three inches of water, this would bring

the centre of the propeller almost on the level of the water ; consequently the blades would have no grip to speak of. I worked this model with my foot whilst lying on my left side, and with a crank somewhat similar to a lathe. After all my trouble, however, she did not answer.

I next dabbled in like manner with invention by placing a propeller under the punt, and working parallel with the bottom. I found this much more successful, but of course no use in shallow water. Perhaps I may succeed some day, as working by the foot gives immense power.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

### PUNTS—(*Continued*).

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A CORRESPONDENT, "Equor," also suggested to me the using of an eel-tailed screw to a punt, the shaft of which could be worked with a wheel and band by one hand under the deck, and asks what I would say to that plan. Well, I believe it has been tried, and found wanting. First, if one hand works the affair, the other hand must guide the craft; and, as one hand cannot very well manage two tiller ropes at once, one is apt to come to grief unless the rudder could be managed with the feet. The screw, however—putting aside the requirements of the gun—would do well enough for going down in an ordinary boat to the fowling grounds; but for actual "working up" in a punt it would be too noisy. Wheels creak, and bands flap; besides, too much room would be taken up by these arrangements, and the blades, as has been remarked, would not have a sufficient grip. On the whole, then, the plan would not be a desirable one for punts.

Then Mr. Everitt wrote about oars as follows:

I am anxious to learn the best system of fixing oars, as thowls are antiquated, and rowlocks have many objections. I regret that I cannot remember how caiques on the Bosphorus are worked, and, although I fear the system impedes feathering, I believe it can be improved and rendered the best for gunning purposes.

and the following reply was received:

For the information of W. S. Everitt, Esq., who wants to know how caiques are worked, I have crossed the Bosphorus many a time. The caiques have a dowel, commonly called a thowel, in the gunwale; the oar

is attached to it by a strip of raw hide. 'The caikegè, or boatman, has a pot of grease always at hand to lubricate the entire concern. From my experience of the entire proceeding I consider it belongs to about one century before the Christian era. Bono Johnny, as we used to call him in the Crimean days, was a great fellow to pull ahead; but when he had to back water, if his raw hide gave way he was done. Do not try it for a gunning punt.

A. M.

I, for one, quite agree that such plans are very antiquated and out of place nowadays, and I thoroughly indorse "Cigarette's" hints, viz.:

For a light punt, pegs, I think, answer well enough; for a heavy punt, there is nothing like outriggers—they give you twice the power, as the fulcrum is not too near, as in the case of thowls. I have oarlocks that fold down flat on the deck when not in use; they are very simple and strong, and they are put upright and the spurs put in or taken out in a moment. I consider screws always fail in holding them firm after long wear and tear, and that nothing can equal short copper bolts, with nuts and screws.

As regards punts, the same correspondent remarked:

Referring again to punts, is not a leaky punt a misery and a spoil-sport? and how hard it is to cure such vessels! In fact, I have had punts that *would* leak somehow or another, and nothing would teach them better; no amount of tinkering or care seemed to do them any good. My golden rule to obviate this common nuisance is to have all my punts, small and large built with *one piece* for the bottom, instead of the usual three. One good piece of wood large enough to make the bottom of a double punt, is of course, hard to get; but when it is fitted it is indeed a blessing, and keeps your craft as dry as a bottle. Another thing about punts which I have not seen alluded to is making them lifeboats. There is nothing like feeling perfectly safe when caught in a squall far from yacht or land. I find, by making a small water-tight compartment in the stem, and another in the stern, myself (sixteen stone), man, gun, and brimful of water, will not put her gunwale under—not even the extra weight of a large Newfoundland, who boarded us under the impression that his master was in a fix.

Last summer (for the sake of experiment) I had an old double-handed punt altered under my own directions to a double centre-board—that is, a centre-board each side under the combing, just leaving you room to lie between. I have not used her myself for sailing on duck, but the friend to whom I gave her tells me she is admirable in that particular line.

"Wildfowler" has given us some good measures for punts, as punts go; and I notice very similar to what Col. Hawker lays down in that respect. My experience is, that out of fifty punts none would be exactly alike. I will be bound, however, that their owners or occupiers will maintain that the crafts that float them at the time is the one and only right build and shape. In fact, to half a foot or so one way or another, there is

no recognised dimension for a punt; and if you have a well-proportioned, and as light a build, consistent with strength as possible, you cannot be far wrong. There is a marvellous difference of opinion concerning punts and guns. Now Folkard, charming writer though he be on all concerning natural history, decoys, &c., is totally unreliable, in my opinion, as to punting. He says he who would go punting with success must go in a single-handed punt, and not in a double. The latter he describes as too large and awkward, and dismisses in half a page. He further adds that a gun carrying a pound of shot is only fit for a yacht. Was there ever such a doctrine as this? and by a modern writer too. Why, the very acme of punting is the double-handed sculling punt. It is out of the question that in the long run any narrow, high-sided single punt can get as near to birds as the double-handed, with its low freeboard, which shows above the water so much less,—not only does the latter draw less water but is six times as steady, and safe as well. The mode of progression, too, is quieter and stealthier in every way, nothing of the mode of propulsion being in view; it is more like the work done by a fish's tail than by oars or paddles. In fact, the double-handed sculling punt is like a screw steamer, and the single-handed like a paddle boat.

Another correspondent, "Widgeon," wrote:

I have read with the greatest pleasure all the letters of "Wildfowler," and I echo the request of many others, that all these most instructive epistles may some day be embodied in a portable volume.

I am induced, as an old lover of "fowling," to write you a few lines on this most exciting sport; and I must commence by saying, by way of apology for troubling you, that I was an intimate friend of the late Col. Hawker, and served, I may say, my apprenticeship under that distinguished sportsman. He (just before his death) was good enough to give me some lines, on which I built a double-handed punt, with that capital builder of boats, Mr. Dagwell, of Lymington, Hants (but I know not whether he is still alive), and which boat I shot in for two or three years on the grand fowling ground lying between Keyhaven and Southampton Water, also in Poole Harbour, during which time I had capital sport. My punt, as I said before, was double-handed, and was turned out in the very best style, both in shape and make—carvel-built, and rounded deck—in my humble opinion, a perfect model for the work. I was so pleased with her, that I took her up to both the Cromarty and Dornock firths, and shot with her there for two seasons. It was during this time that I made one of my best "flying shots" at Brent geese, bagging twenty-six birds; but how many cripples escaped I am unable to say, as it occurred just before dark. My gun was made (muzzle-loader) by Clayton of Southampton, 8ft. in the barrel, and 1½ in. bore, carrying 1lb. of shot, with rope-breeching only. The stock of this gun was hardly a foot long, and made to ship and unship when needed, in wet or snowy weather; and, moreover, it had the advantage of not taking up much room in the boat. My loading rod was of the best ash, with a copper spout, to hold the

charge of powder, and cut away, about half-way down the spout, to permit the powder to fall into the barrel when loading. I also had a strip cut all the way up the ash pole, so as to keep it from turning over and spilling the powder before it reached the breech chamber. This rod is chiefly used when loading at night. I always used Eley's cartridges (1lb.), No. 1 shot, for widgeon and duck, and S.S.G. cartridge for geese, loose shot, 1½lb. for nightwork.

Now, as to the relative advantages of double and single handed punts. My humble opinion is, that a double-handed punt ought to be used by amateurs (I mean those who shoot for sport only), and a single punt for professionals; and, as "Wildfowler's" letters are for the instruction of the former, I trust he will agree with me in this matter. I think a double-handed boat is for pleasure, and the other for profit.

"Widgeon's" wishes are now gratified as to my articles being republished in book form, and I trust he will like the present volume; but my thanks are due to him for his appreciative and appreciated remarks, and I beg to say that I quite agree with his views as to the use of double and single handed punts; indeed, I have already stated as much, and I am pleased to find that our respective opinions tally so well.

Some further remarks on punts were contributed by "Punter," thus:

Many readers will derive much information from the papers of "Wildfowler." In building a single-handed gunning punt, there are many important points to consider. The length must be ruled by the weight and length of the gun. A punt of 17ft. would be too long for a short gun; all the weight being forward, she would be too much "by the head" to work easily. A punt, to work well, must have an even keel, which can only be done by the men and gun coming pretty well near the centre.

3ft. beam will be found quite small enough for coast shooting with safety; a "clinker"-built, sharp at both ends, with a good strong oak keel 1½in. to 2in. thick; the stem and sternpiece made very strong, of oak, the planking selected ¾in. yellow pine. It should not be a round-bottom, but take a turn downward from the keel to the bilge, and sharply round from the bilge to gunwale; deck, fore and aft and side deck, 6in. wide; bulwarks all round to come along the after deck about 2ft., meeting at an angle like the letter V, to throw off the sea breaking on the deck. The punt should have fixed or movable outriggers (which will give much greater propelling power), and row stern first (except when making to birds). This will be found very convenient, and of much service, when having long distances to row, with, perhaps, more sea than the punter expected; the weight of the gun keeps the stern as it should be—well up in the sea. I shall be very glad to give any of your readers drawings of a punt as above, which I have found very stiff and seaworthy.



I wrote to "Punter," as I have already stated, and he sent me full plans of his punt, but did not wish them to be published, otherwise, I should have been but too well pleased to have presented them to my readers.

The question of buoyancy, on the lifeboat principle of air-tight compartments, was then discussed, when the following suggestion was made :

Will "Wildfowler" permit me to propose that the air-tight compartments be filled with cork shavings, which would still render the punt buoyant in the event of a sudden strain opening her timbers and compartments ; also, that the outriggers, or rowlocks, and paddles, when they work in them be cased with rubber instead of leather.—MAC.

To this I rejoined :

"Mac's" suggestions are excellent, but would not india-rubber bags filled with air fulfil the desired object still better than shavings, by keeping the punt buoyant under all circumstances ?

And this question was satisfactorily settled by "Punter," who declared that he had tried the plan, and had found it answer admirably. Finally, the following query was sent from Ireland to the *Field* :

I have read with much interest all the articles in the *Field* on "Modern Wildfowling," by "Wildfowler" I have had very little experience in punt shooting, but am going to build one for next season. Col. Hawker's smaller punt, 21ft. 4in. over all, has a height of 6in. at the bow, rising to 11in. at the stern. A professional on the Upper Shannon near me has a punt 21ft. long, 6in. in height at the bow and stern, and 8in. in height amidships.

It is the exact model of one which a gentleman brought over from England a few years ago, and whom he attended for two or three seasons on the sea coasts, with a heavy gun. Having a punt higher amidships than at the stem and stern, appears to me the best construction for dryness and safety in rough weather. It is the principle on which vessels with a low freeboard are built, and I have noticed a steam yacht in the form of a double cone off Ryde in the yachting season. I should feel very much obliged to "Wildfowler" if he would kindly give me his opinion on the subject through the medium of your columns ; it would be of use to others as well as myself. I intend having the ends watertight, and also I think the sides under the deck, so as to have four watertight compartments. These I shall fill with cork shavings, many thanks to "Mac's" hint. I also propose filling up the spaces between the flooring timbers with slabs of cork. I fancy this will be rather expensive, but will render the punt doubly safe. It will also do away with the necessity of bottom boards,

and, being softer than wood, one would not require so thick a rug to lie upon. I propose putting the punt together with brass screws, except where I use copper bolts.

Parsonstown, Ireland, Feb. 17.

F. S. H.

I replied as follows :—F. S. H. is quite right. The height of the side plank should be at least 8in. amidships, so as to give the necessary “flam,” since the width at bottom (amidships) is smaller than the width at gunwale, by some 9in. or 10in. But the height of 6in. at the bow and stern is unusual. I should say that 6in. at bows, 10in. amidships, and 8in. at stern would be nearer the mark, because all the weight is thrown aft, and the extra depth astern will allow the punt to ride perfectly level when her crew is aboard.

As regards the cork shavings, I think the indiarubber bag dodge, previously referred to, far preferable, that is, if room can really be spared in the punt for either. Under the foredeck the thing is feasible enough, but aft, there is usually but little room to spare, particularly in double-handed punts.

Before bringing this chapter to a conclusion I must state that I had received from Mr. Booth a photo of one of his double-handed punts; but the photo was too old and faded to be reliable. The punt, however, looks a most charming model, and I should have liked to have had her illustrated; but, under the circumstances, this could not be done, unfortunately.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### LAUNCHING PUNTS AND CANOES.

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I now come to launching punts, open canoes, and dinghies, &c., used for wildfowl shooting. The original form of craft used for the purpose of punting was what was called the Hampshire launching punt—a narrow craft, built with round stern, wherein the fowlers worked their guns on a plain swivel, rigged on a knee fixed direct to the bottom plank—a system which is to this day resorted to in some districts where the swivel is rigged direct into a block of elm secured to the bottom plank. In the Hampshire punts there was not much room to spare, as they were only 14ft. long and very narrow; hence the guns were all with pistol stocks so-called, so as to take as little room as possible. The punts were paddled or poled, as usual; but they are now almost entirely discarded. They were certainly most primitive specimens of boat building. The guns used in these crank concerns were rarely above 50lb. in weight, and fired from 9oz. to 12oz. of shot. The Poole canoe, on the other hand, is built sharp at both ends, so as to be used readily forward or backward. In short, it has no stem or stern, being exactly alike afore and aft; and the reason for this is obvious: In a narrow creek, on the canoe is in, it cannot be turned; hence the sculler and the shooter have only to change places when they wish to leave the creek, as the boat will travel equally well any end on.

There is an immense amount of fun to be had out of a canoe wherever many creeks abound; but the style of pursuing the sport is very different to that of punting.

Of course, the canoe is painted white, except her bottom, which is usually red-leaded extensively to keep her from leaking, and she is fitted with two pairs of rowlocks, which are both used by the shooter and the sculler for rowing when travelling to and fro the fowling grounds. Once arrived there, however, the two men should assume their shooting stations, *i.e.*, the shooter should hide forward with his gun, whilst the sculler, with one hand over the starboard gunwale, should exclusively attend to propelling the canoe, either with a scull or with a setting pole. Both men should wear white woollen coats, with hoods drawn over their caps or hats —than which nothing answers better. My own punting and shore shooting suits are all fitted with these hoods. My wildfowl clothes and hats are all made at Ulster House, Conduit-street, and the firm understand what is required admirably. Now, some fowl or big shore birds being discovered feeding on the flats, the sculler drives the canoe up the nearest leeward creek, and proceeds carefully along its windings, not showing more of his head when reconnoitring, or of his motions when at work, than he can help. Of course a half-ebb or a flow-tide should be chosen for that sport, so as to have the shelter of the banks of the creeks to hide the canoe's progress. When arrived at some little distance up the creek, the sculler should stop sculling or poling, as the motion otherwise would render the footing of his companion insecure. The shooting companion then should get on his right knee as noiselessly as he can (he could not shoot his heavy gun lying down or sitting down on the bottom of the canoe), and he should look ahead. Nothing being in the way, he should raise his head and body slowly and carefully until he is enabled to peep over the flats; he thus can mark the whereabouts of the birds, and, resuming his former position, he signals his sculler how he is to proceed, and stops him again when he fancies he is near enough for a shot, when the sculler drives his scull or his pole firmly into the mud, thus rendering the canoe steady and stationary. The shooter then rises as before, takes up his big gun (which should carry at least 3oz. of shot), aims, calls out or whistles, and fires

as the fowl rise. This programme is carried out by night or by day, and is as simple and as entertaining as can be. I have been many times very happy in a canoe, proceeding as I have related, and especially when one likes to kill everything that comes by, and is handy, I think it is a most entertaining piece of business; I, however, was very often quite alone in my canoe, so I had to do the sculling and the shooting, and I have often shouldered my canoe and carried it from creek to creek, or dragged it along, as occasion required, over the saltings. In fact, a canoe should always be very light. It should be as flat-bottomed as possible, but a keel is desirable. I used to sail mine with a shoulder-o'-mutton sail, going home or on my way down the rivers, when the wind was dead aft or almost so, and the fun I have had in that little boat I could not tell. I served my wildfowl apprenticeship in her, and to this day I revert to her with feelings very much akin to love, however absurd it may appear to some people. My canoe was only 10ft. long, from stem to stern, and 3ft. 4in. broad amidships between gunwales; height 10in. rising to 12in. fore and aft. She weighed about 70lb. or 80lb. The usual weight, however, for double-handed canoes is 100lb. or thereabouts, and, according to Col. Hawker's measurements, such a canoe should be: 12ft. long from stem to stern, 10ft. in bottom, width 3ft. 2in. at bottom, rising to 3ft. 7in. amidships from gunwale to gunwale, height 11in. at centre rising to 13in. fore and aft. The timbers should be or yew or oak. Bottom to be three pieces of elm or yellow pine, an inch thick. Each side one plank of elm, one-third of an inch thick.

Of course, the necessity for having the canoe built as flat-bottomed as possible is evident. The less water the craft will draw the more fun will the sportsman have, since, when only two or three inches of water remain in the creeks, he can still proceed; whereas, with a heavier craft riding deeper in the water, he would be brought to a standstill very speedily. Still the bottom should not be quite flat, but rounded slightly, which will make the craft much easier of management, and she should be "sprung" fore and aft as well. Were the bottom

to be quite flat, its suction of the mud, when run aground, would be so great as to require a tremendous effort to free her. That is the very reason why I discarded, long ago, the flat mud-boards, or "splashers," of professionals for my own mud pattens, illustrated and described at page 219. The old mud pattens, being flat, "sucked" so hard, that the cords which fastened them to one's feet frequently broke under the strain when one tried to lift up his feet; and, if the cords did not give way, they pinched and squeezed one's feet and ankles most unmercifully, quite indenting the boots, in fact; whereas, by my system, not the slightest difficulty is ever experienced. Messrs. Silver, of 67, Cornhill, are the makers of my mud pattens.

It is only in some favoured localities that launching can systematically be resorted to, and even then the old Hampshire launching punts were about as awkward to manage as could be possibly imagined, and in squally weather they were simply nowhere for afloat work, whatever they might have done by popping in the creeks from the mud. Thus, when the fowl were sheltered in the creeks, on account of stormy weather, the fleet of launching punts, properly worked, would score; but, when they did so, once in a way, in a wholesale manner, they broke the haunts of the birds, and thus did an incalculable amount of harm to the locality; for it is a curious thing to observe that fowl much fired at in their harbour forsake it almost readily, whereas, in the open, it will take a good deal of harassing to drive them away for good. Of course the professional launchers entered into no such considerations. They found that, with a sea on, their launching punts could not do any good, even if the fowl had been in the open; but as, on the contrary, the fowl were driven by stress of weather to shelter themselves in the creeks amongst the flats, it followed that, with hard work, the launchers had everything in their favour for the time being, and they always took advantage thereof. The labour, however, of launching is excessive and hardly credible, and its discomforts are quite on as high a level as the degree of exertion it requires. In fact, no man, unless endowed with almost herculean strength, ever was very successful at that sort of game. To be crawling about all

night from creek to creek, dragging over the mud a heavy punt, is no joke. I have done now and then a little of that sort of work, when in a light punt or canoe—i.e., just visited two or three creeks where I had some idea of finding a shot—but I never went launching systematically. I may add that the little I did in that line convinced me that a more filthy pursuit (materially speaking) does not exist. To say that you are in a terrible mess is to say nothing. Were you rolled along in the ooze for a couple of hundred yards you could hardly be in a worse plight. Hands, face, clothes, boots—everything is mud, mud, mud. It is fearful work; and, to clean the punt when once more at the “hard,” is an unmitigated treat. Nevertheless, there are cases when a little launching, judiciously indulged in, helps to swell the bag most encouragingly; and therefore I would never hesitate to resort to it when I had some good reliable ground for believing that it was worth trying. But never attempt to do it with a heavy craft, for, if you do, you will certainly come to grief.

A baler should always be carried aboard. It should be made of stout leather as regards the scoop, and the head should be made of wood, square at the bottom and with a handle. Avoid, for wildfowl shooting, all tin pots, &c., which some men indifferently resort to—because they are noisy in a boat, both when in use and when not in use. I have often, in the stillness of the night, heard men baling out their punts with a tin pot or pan when they were fully half a mile away from me. That is not the way to do things. And again, supposing a shot turns up in a hurry, your foot is sure to happen to kick the blessed tin pot, and thereupon the birds bolt. Ashore, however, on the flats, as a matter of fact, the usual way resorted to by professionals is to tilt up their craft so as to empty out the water; but if the thing is to be done in the dark, look out for your things, for, if they once fall out of the punt, it is two to one you lose them. Sometimes the punt is built with a hole aft, and the said hole is plugged with a cork, so that by removing the cork and tilting up the stem of the punt, all the water is got rid of; but you must not do as several men have done—i.e., forget to plug the hole again

—for if so, when you will get afloat again you will have good cause to wonder what makes the punt leak so. In short, you should on no account let go of the cork until you have put it back in its hole. If you were to put it down you might trample on it, and lose it in the ooze, or the wind might blow it away on the water, and then what would become of you with your unplugged punt when the tide rose again? Of course, you would cram your handkerchief, &c., into the hole, but the punt would still leak. *Ergo*, let the cork be uppermost in your mind.

Now, from what I have said, it will be seen that some launching may have to be done with almost any craft; but the desirability of having a punt which can be used in the open as well as being dragged over the flats is so self-evident that it needs no enlarging upon, and this consideration led to the building of small-decked light punts, to be used as either launching punts or canoes, and superior to both, since they do not ship a sea so readily as either, and are lighter than the former and as light as the latter.

Col. Hawker gives the following dimensions for such a punt, to be used of course with shoulder guns: Length from stem to stern, 14ft.; length at bottom, 13ft. 4in.; width at gunwale, amidships, 3ft. 8in.; width of bottom, 3ft.; spring fore and aft, 3½in.; kammel or rounding, 1½in.; depth at bow, 7in.; depth at stern, 1ft. 1in.; weight about 120lb. A very excellent sketch of such a punt is given at page 359 of the colonel's work. The punt is shown as being slung on to a punt carriage, and the illustration speaks for itself. When speaking of canoe shooting, the colonel recommends taking with you a small Newfoundland dog for a retriever. Now, a dog, wherever the ooze will bear him, will certainly retrieve some lively cripples which otherwise would have escaped your notice in the darkness; but I have tried dogs of various breeds, and found them all wanting in one all-important point—just before you fire. Yes, the dogs will keep steady enough as long as you are rowing or poling your craft, when in fact it would not so much matter then if they did move; but the moment you



lay hold of the big shoulder gun they are startled, and as you slowly bring it to your shoulder, they whine with excitement, or jump about ready for a start. Indeed, I had once a very clever dog (for retrieving, I mean), whose idiosyncracies in that line were so pronounced that I had to cheat him—i.e., first reconnoitre, and then shoulder and fire suddenly, so as not to give him time to make any loud demonstration. Away then he would go, and he would certainly do good work then by nailing the runners first, and the mud flappers next, whilst I picked up the dead 'uns (as my man called them); but the mess the dog was in, and the way he mudded the boat, added to that defect of his of whining or getting ready with sudden earnestness when I was going to fire, compelled me to give up his company, much as I liked having him with me for picking up lively birds—and I would urge upon shooters, therefore, not to take dogs with them. You must never be flurried, and, if you know that your dog is likely to startle the birds, you hurry up to deliver your fire, and don't do near so well as you might have done. Therefore, I should not advise a dog to be taken.

Working up to fowl in launching punts, canoes, and light punts is subject to the same rules which have been already referred to when treating of punting proper, i.e., with punt guns. The same precautions and the same manœuvres hold good for either craft. When dealing with mud flats one should always face the west in the evening, or the moon, if there be any, and the east in the morning. If acting thus in the evening for a goodish while after the sun has set, the light in the west brings into relief anything which may be on the flats, and so if the shooter from a creek peers over the flats, raising his head gently on a level with the banks, and keeping perfectly still, supposing the birds are perfectly silent, or a wind is blowing in such a direction that he cannot hear any of their noises, he will, anyhow, soon see one or two, or more, of them move. Having ascertained that much, he should take up his gun and get ready, but wait patiently until he can see the bulk of the fowl; for it frequently occurs that, through over-greediness, one spoils a good shot by firing at

four or five birds which he can see, whereas by waiting until the whole show themselves he could have had a good rake in their ranks. I have been guilty of such a thing myself several times. Seeing a lump of four or five birds, I would fire and kill two, three, or four, when from beyond them, in some hollow of the flat where they were protected from the shot, perhaps two or three score or even hundreds of fowl would rise. When this occurs the shooter is apt to use terms reflecting more or less strongly on his folly; therefore one's patience in such circumstances should be resorted to. I find that, if I see two or three heads on the move, the best plan is to listen intently for a few moments, and, if no noise is heard, to fire as soon as five or six heads are seen in sufficiently close proximity to each other; but the chances are great that the feeding of many bills will be heard, and, if one only gives them time to show themselves, a good shot may be had. On the other hand, waiting is dangerous, in this way—a heron, a shank, a curlew, or some such other wideawake customer may happen to come your way, and, seeing you, suddenly jump up and scream an alarm, when the fowl will rise *en masse* and are gone, unless you seize the opportunity of their rising to let fly among them. Herons, curlews, and shanks, however, when on the wing, do not always readily detect you. I can safely say that I have seen hundreds of such birds flying about me who did not notice me. But you must lie like a log, and probably they take you for a log. If you have a dog, however, it is all up; for the dog is sure to turn his head and follow the motions of the bird, who forthwith screams out "Look out!" to all whom it may concern, and these are not slow in availing themselves of this most desirable information. But if you are alone, very still, and your hood is over your head, why, tribes of birds may cross the creek and not so much as look at you. Nay, I have hundreds of times popped up my head until my eyes were on a level with the saltings, and seen birds feeding about me and strutting about in very ill-founded security. But, unless you are properly attired and equipped, you cannot do anything of the sort, and it is absurd to go wildfowl shooting in one's ordinary clothes. Now, some time ago,

to give an instance in point, two men killed thirty-five geese just below Canvey Island (geese were swarming there). Well, two London shooters were about the place, heard of the success met by the puntsmen, and forthwith engaged *an ordinary ship's dinghy*, with two men, and went, expecting to come back with a load of geese! They returned at night with *one* sandpiper! And how could they expect to do better? Yet it is the hardest thing imaginable to impress on a man who is not conversant with the sport the absolute necessity of being properly attired, and of having the use of a suitable craft. Now, with these one can do wonders, and with almost perfect ease one may inspect the flats. With some puddles of water beyond the birds, their slightest motions are seen at night, provided, as stated before, one faces the light, of course.

As to firing, one must adapt his fire to circumstances. If the birds are within fair range, and pretty thick together, fire point blank as much in the middle of the lot as possible, by which means the entire bulk of your shot will work havoc in their ranks: whereas if you fired on a level with the flat, you would lose a good deal of shot into the first birds, and the furthest ones would escape. For the same reason, if the fowl are in a hollow, you should rise above them well, if possible, before firing; or, if you cannot rise sufficiently high to cover them, the tide being low, and you are sure, by the noise, that there is a lot of them out of your sight, but handy, the best plan is to call out, and fire just as the bulk of them rise. Never attempt to land at low tide and climb up banks, if birds are likely to be somewhat near you; for, before you will be able to reach the top and have a secure footing, the noise of your motions will give them the alarm. If, when you are peeping over the bank, you see some heads which are motionless, keep absolutely still. These birds are suspicious and listening, and at the least motion they would sound the alarm. But if they begin moving about and feeding, you can reconnoitre to your heart's content. By moonlight, shooting is quite easy; but by starlight you cannot distinguish the birds plainly, and you should aim just above their confused

dark mass, if they are fifty or sixty yards off; and when you fire in a dark night—strange as the advice may seem—*shut your eyes*. Thereupon I believe I can hear 'Arry calling out in great glee: "Here's a lark! Shut one's eyes when shooting! Tell that to the marines." Of course I would not undertake to teach 'Arry what, no doubt, he knows better than I do; but, all the same, I repeat my advice: "Just as you pull your trigger, shut your eyes." The reason for this is simply that if you should keep your eyes open, you would be so dazzled by the sudden flash in the previous darkness that for some precious moments—just the very moments when your liveliest cripples will be making good their escape—you will be literally blinded, and totally unable to hit any bird with certainty with your cripple gun, since you cannot see the birds at all. *Ergo*, shut your eyes. I do. Then I jump ashore, and with my first two barrels I polish off two runners. Never mind the "flapping" fowl; they are all right. Fowl that only can flap on the mud are done for, but those that can trot, do trot with a vengeance, especially if they have yet a sound wing. These are the sort that require a fresh dose instantly, so as to make matters safe. If both you and your man land, be careful that the anchor is fluked *on the bank*. Otherwise, were you to delay your coming back for some time, you might not be able to get aboard of the punt again.

According to my opinion, the best chances in a much-shot-over harbour are at ground ebb, and in one where you are about alone to shoot, at low tide, and I will give my reasons why.

In a lonely harbour, when the wind suits, *i.e.*, comes from the side of the moon or light, one may knock about the creeks and latches without the fear of a neighbour's shot disturbing the fowl or his presence to their windward sending them away. Hence, when once you have heard your widgeon, even when they are out of range, you can always wait an hour or so, or more if necessary, until the tide allows you to creep nearer to them; and if you wait long enough, as the tide rises, the widgeon will congregate on the mud still left bare, and will not go away until disturbed or they have no longer a footing.

Therefore, in such a favoured locality, waiting until they are thus all crammed together is bound to give a tremendous bag (provided, of course, the gunner knows how to proceed).

On a much-shot-over harbour, on the contrary, were anyone to wait thus, the chances are very great that the waiting would be in vain ; not only because a distant shot may disturb the fowl, or a gunner's boat ahead may frighten them away by giving them the strange gunner's scent ; but also because, if the fowl have been already worked up to under similar circumstances, they will go long before the tide is sufficiently high to allow a punt to get near them. I, therefore, argue, from experience as well as from theory, that one would have in such a spot a far better chance of success by watching the flats at high tide near those spots that he knows get bare first as the ebb begins ; because the very moment that the water gets white the widgeon know it and get noisy, and scarcely have the flats begun to re-appear than the principal and best known feeding parts are forthwith tenanted, and you have then four things in your favour : 1. A good target, since the birds by moonlight will appear quite black against the shining pools of water ; 2. A fair wind, which gives you every chance of reaching them, since they cannot scent you ; 3. A good background to come up to them from, your part of the water being dark ; 4. Plenty of water to speedily work up to them without loss of time.

As to hearing them, when widgeon first settle on a strip of saltings, for half a mile or more when the wind is in your favour and the host is numerous you can hear them, as they are so pleased at finding food that they must needs let everybody know it that is in the neighbourhood. Besides which, in a well-frequented resort, from the moment that the fowl are lifted off their feet by the tide to the moment that they find again their feeding ground bare, they are almost constantly on the move, and their evolutions to an experienced man are like an open book. File after file file away to the saltings as soon as they reappear, and the calling of those who have found a good place is absolutely unmistakable. The cocks whistle, the hens coo, the youngsters clack their bills, and the flapping of

wings as they settle themselves for a good meal, is a most welcome sound to the gunner. Their crowds appear always at night very black, and, as the tide recedes from the saltings, millions of little puddles are left about on the surface of the flats; and of course as the birds move about their motions against these brilliant little puddles are set off quite as much as if they were walking about with pieces of looking-glass in the background to render them more distinct. Therefore there can be no delusion on the point. The main thing, however, for this ground ebb sport is to quickly set up to them, and speedily let them "have it," because the tide recedes so fast in some places that a minute more or less may make a difference of a hundred yards in the working near of a punt. And the thing will be easily understood by those who may not have had any practical knowledge of the subject. Let us suppose that saltings, as a whole, were as flat as a billiard table, for argument sake; well then, the moment the tide recedes from them the whole is uncovered, so to speak, and hence, unless one works quickly, one is stranded, and cannot get near the place where the fowl might have pitched. Of course this is an outrageous picture of the case, set thus purposely, however, to bring my argument into relief; for, saltings are not perfectly flat, and that is why a local knowledge of the ground is of paramount importance, since in a case of such emergency, a man who knows the deflections of the particular ooze he is working over will paddle there, and get up quickly to his fowl, whereas a stranger would get helplessly stuck long before he was within range. Indeed on some saltings, which are very intricate even to the professionals, the latter have the habit of slyly placing slender poles, which act to them as beacons, but puzzle the amateurs. These poles are thrust in the ooze at low tide along the latches, and thus mark to the gunners what course they are to pursue, whichever way they want to go.

This is of the very first importance, and it only requires a study of the place in day time in order to insure a thorough knowledge of one's whereabouts at all times. How often has it occurred that a stranger meeting another punter, tells him

that he has seen a strip of widgeon settling yonder, but he could not get near them; when the other, forthwith, paddles his punt away, and a few minutes later the boom of his punt gun proclaims to his mortified *confrère* that *he* has managed to get a rake at them when he had given them up. In short, in punting as well as in any other pursuit, "knowledge is power," and, unless a punter knows his actual district, it is ten to one that he would do quite as well to stay at home.

Now, for this sort of night work, in open weather, the staple fowl one kills are widgeon. It is well known that ducks, pochards or dunbirds, teal, &c., at flight time resort to inland ponds, rivers, streams, and lakes. This they will do invariably at sunset. But, when the frost is severe, and has lasted some time, then the ducks, teal, &c., are, perforce, driven to seek their food elsewhere; and, as the saltings alone never freeze (being twice a day covered by the tide), there they all repair for their feed, and in such weather then they may be found with the other fowl. But, except under such circumstances, the vast majority of fowl killed over saltings are widgeon; at times, however, pintails and teal remain with them. The whistling of cock widgeon is not unlike the words "wee—oh!" softly undulated—hence the name "whew," given them by some old naturalists; but, unless set to music, it is impossible to give an idea of its intonation. I had once a musical friend with me in a punt, purposely to get the notes of birds set to music, and he got them so faithfully that he afterwards reproduced their calls marvellously well. He wrote them down for me, but I have mislaid them now. The calls, of course, greatly vary with the spirit of gregariousness, which, in widgeon, as in men, increases in direct ratio with hard times. Yes, strange as it may seem, it is so. In mild, open weather, the birds scatter themselves over the flats, and do not trouble much about each other, so much so that it is very rare that one gets a good shot at them then, for two reasons: (1) being all dispersed, a good rake cannot be had; (2) just when you are trying to make out the bulk of the "company," some outlying birds will scream an alert, and the lot are gone! In

very hard times, on the contrary, widgeon crowd together, call themselves together, and stick together; and the harder the weather the tighter they close, partly for warmth's sake and security's sake doubtless, and also because, when one has found a good place, they all want to wrest it from him—just like men.

The greediness with which such crowds feed, however, tells greatly against them; for, once at it, they do not readily leave off, and the big guns then come into play. If a punter is very cautious in his working, he cannot fail to detect widgeon feeding, even if they do not call—which sometimes occurs when they are very hungry, by listening for the noise of their bills. Now, when the tide is ebbing, anything sounding like dripping water should be at once investigated, because—although it might be some puddles on the flats emptying themselves in a latch or a creek, it might also be widgeon feeding, and the two noises, at a distance, are exactly similar. If, therefore, the shooter listens patiently, and the noise is produced by birds, he will soon hear some “charming” from them, which will conclusively set his mind at rest; or, if he looks up carefully, he may perchance discover their whereabouts at once. But he must proceed very carefully when so doing, and he must regulate his actions from their noise and motions. Thus, if the feeding stops, he should stop; then some old cock will probably call, the hens will coo softly in answer, and soon the host will feed again, when the paddles or the setting pole may be resumed; but, should the punter observe some birds walking away from him, the case is getting very critical. The fact is, these birds have not made out yet what cause of alarm they may have; but they have heard something, and are distrustful, and, at the slightest further cause, the lot will take to their wings. It requires then perfect silence for a few minutes on the punter's part; for, no sooner have the suspicious birds begun their evolutions than the whole company throw up their heads to look up and listen also, and, with so many sharp pairs of ears listening and eyes looking, it behoves the shooter to be extra quiet. Indeed, sometimes, notwithstanding all



his carefulness, the company rise and sheer off; but, if the harbour is quiet, and no shot has been fired, they may perhaps settle again further on on the flats; and, indeed, I once had a second shot myself within a few moments at the same company settling again near the cripples of my first shot; but such are exceptional cases. If, however, no shot has been fired, and the weather is hard, it is more than probable that the widgeon shall not leave the harbour, but will pitch again readily enough at the first available shelter or feeding salting. If, therefore, the shooter hunts them up, he may have a shot after all, but it will require extreme caution then; and, whether he succeeds or not, the moment they will rise a second time he may say farewell to them for ever, in the vast majority of cases, for they will, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, go clear away this, the second time of asking. This being so, I think it a bad plan to pursue them persistently, and, indeed, breaking up their haunts thus is apt to ruin a harbour for some time; but the selfishness of some men is so great, that, for the sake of one shot in their favour, they will not scruple to run the risk of driving away all the fowl; and, even when out of range, they fire, if they see that another man is setting up to the fowl, and is likely to have a rake into them.

I have seen that sort of thing done scores of times, and, moreover, I have heard the men afterwards boasting of having done it.

Truly this is acting the part of the dog in the manger—"I can't have the birds, then no one shall have them!" And boom! goes the big gun a quarter of a mile off.

I remember one such case so well that I must narrate it. A spiteful professional was just glorying on a "hard" about having spoilt some stranger's chance, when one of those present, who happened to be the very stranger, politely asked him to step up, and gave him such a drubbing, fair and square, as he had never had in his life; and when he plaintively appealed to the bystanders, they said, "Sarves you right!"—an expression of opinion which I, for one, most thoroughly indorsed.

Whilst on the subject of punts and canoes, I may state that someone propounded the query as to whether Berthon's collapsible boats could be used for punting, and I replied: They are totally useless for punting, as you can (1) neither paddle them (2) nor scull them; (3) their colour is against them (this, however, could be remedied); (4) they draw too much water; (5) they have unsteady bearings; (6) they slew round at the slightest provocation; (7) they have too much freeboard, and therefore are too prominent to the fowl; (8) they have no deck for a punt gun, and are too lightly built to bear one, or its strain either. And as for "crowding" work, if in the dark one chanced to drag or shove them over a bed of winkles, their bottoms would be forthwith damaged. Altogether they are perfectly inadmissible for punting.

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## CHAPTER XIX.

### PUNTING ACCESSORIES.

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VARIOUS expedients have been resorted to in order to render punt guns invisible to the fowl. Some barrels are nickel plated, &c. I have seen one such gun, but I would have preferred to have it painted the same colour as the punt—a greenish white. The puntsman himself and his attendant, if he has one, should also appear white. They may dress as they please, but in the punt over all they must wear a white coat or smock frock, with a close-fitting white hood.

This overall should not be too long, because if it were, it would interfere with the puntsman rising quickly to his feet for cripple work after a shot whenever need be. It should just reach to within five or six inches of the knees, or even more, so as not to be caught at any time under the knees when the shooter is lying down. Another thing again, which will be found very comfortable, is a large pair of oilskin breeches pulled over the sea boots, trousers, and coat. This prevents the wet, when in a sea, from reaching the loins and thighs of the sportsman. Without such waterproof contrivances, punting is a misery, and, in fact, a positive impossibility in heavy weather.

Hats must be eschewed, unless they are very narrow-brimmed ones. I need not remark that in severe winter weather the very warmest of clothing should be worn, and plenty of it. Sea boots should encase the legs up to the thighs ; and anyone, when it freezes very hard, will be pleased

to have put on three or four pairs of long woollen stockings. I, moreover, always wear flannel shirts and underclothing, and in other respects take excellent care of myself, the pursuit being the most trying I know of to one's constitution. "Equor," on this subject, said :

I wear a chamois leather jacket, just over the flannel shirt, and stowed inside the trousers, with the sailor's jersey, white flannel jacket over that, and a stout waterproof, the usual waterproof of course. The leather jacket has certainly saved my life before, for if you get heated you cool slowly. This hint was given me by an old friend and medical officer, who had been a long time in India.

In short, when rigged out for winter punting a man should look double like, or pretty nearly, his usual size, and he should not feel cold even when inactive for hours. I need not add that waterproof overcoats and trousers are a *sine quâ non* of the sport. Sou'-westers and oilskins are mostly used by professionals, and, when suitable in colour, they answer very well at most times ; but some amateurs resort to white indiarubber stuffs, and that is still better.

The best gloves to be used when punting in severe weather should be of a woollen fabric ; of course they should be made as thick as possible. They should be designed on the following plan, viz. : for the left hand, all the fingers together, but the thumb separate ; for the right hand the same plan should be pursued, but a hole should be provided between the thumb and first finger, through which to thrust the first finger when a cripple gun-trigger is to be pulled. In any other circumstance the first finger remains with the others in one common pouch, so to speak ; and it is astonishing to note how warm they keep when together ; whereas, if in separate receptacles, as in ordinary gloves, they are benumbed in no time. Some men, however, for the right hand, have their glove made to fit the thumb and first finger separately, and the three other fingers together. By this plan they avoid having to thrust a bare finger through the glove when they want to fire at cripples. This is a good plan, as it not only prevents the first finger from getting benumbed by the frost, but it also makes it less sensitive to the cold iron of the gun, which is at times

far below zero in temperature. The thickness of the glove also deadens the kicking of the trigger or guard.

When I first took to punting, I imagined that thick sheepskin gloves, with the wool inside, would be just the thing, and so they proved to be as long as I kept them dry, but the moment water touched them the skin got hard, and the whole affair was then stiff and cold, and comfortless; and, moreover, its suppleness could not be restored, whereas woollen gloves may get as wet as can be. Wring them dry, expose them to the air, and they are again as good as ever. If, however, a man goes punting double-handed, and has absolutely nothing to attend to but his guns, there is no reason why he should not use sheepskin gloves if he likes. They are certainly exceedingly warm if kept from wet. The general plan, then, for punting gloves is to have the thumb kept distinct from the fingers, so as to be able, without taking off one's gloves, to tip the big gun, use the oars, the paddles, or the scull, or the setting pole, and to handle the cripple gun comfortably. Now, concerning the latter, woollen gloves do not give a fellow so good a grip of his gun as sheepskin gloves, but it cannot be helped, and if a man goes single-handed, and has to do everything—the paddling and the picking up included—he must resort to woollen gloves, and will do well to have a couple of pairs handy in his ammunition box, in case those he is wearing get wringing wet, when they are not exactly very comfortable wear.

A cap with flaps comes very handy when one has to wait for the tide in some out-of-the-way place; but in actual work the flaps should not be tied against the ears, because then, although they certainly keep one's ears warm, they also prevent you from hearing the noises of the fowl, and very often that is the only notice one has of their approach when they are on the wing in daytime, for instance; and at night the puntsman is mostly guided by his sense of hearing, combined of course with his knowledge of the usual haunts of the birds, for it stands to reason that if a man went at night in a place unknown to him, trusting only to his ears to find birds, well, he might chance to hit upon some, but it would be a

most terrible fluke. Whereas the man who knows the estuary he is in, makes tracks at once towards those spots which he knows (from experience and also intuition) are likely to hold fowl; and when he gets within tolerable distance he proceeds carefully and noiselessly, looking ahead and around with all his eyes, and listening intently with all his ears. The flaps of his cap would then be in his way, and his hood, for the same reason, should not fit too closely to his head. It must be close-fitting enough not to flap about his ears in a breeze, and easy enough to allow the puntsman's ears free scope of action, but not so easy as to drop off his head naturally.

Some men (amongst whom I class myself) avoid caps precisely because they think that they prevent them from hearing distinctly enough, especially when used with hoods as well, as the hood is apt then to lie flat against the ears, if the cap is very flat. These puntsmen then resort to hats of a peculiar make—round, with very narrow curled-up brims—and the material is of course soft, and of a whitish colour. The narrow brim keeps the hood at a distance from the ears, and this answers the purpose admirably. But with caps, if the flaps are tied above head, they project just over the ears, and thus effect the same purpose as the brims of soft hats.

I enter into these details because they are of the utmost practical importance. Nothing is more bothering than a badly fitting and badly made hood. When easy and comfortable, not only does it effect its object to perfection, *i.e.*, renders the puntsman's head invisible; but in cold weather it is the most comforting thing I know of. I have been, with it on, as warm as could be when ice was all around me a foot or two thick, and the weather cold enough withal to freeze off the hammers of my guns; but the moment I removed my hood—golly! did not my ears catch it!

However, when the above appeared in the *Field*, "An Old Gunner" of twenty years' standing wrote to say that he punts with buckskin gloves; that he wears only one pair of stockings when punting; and that he does not wear flannel, all of which views differ from mine and all authorities. But

if my correspondent likes his plan, of course he can put it in practice; there is no law to prevent any man from going in his nightshirt if he likes—indeed, with a cotton nightcap, it would be a capital plan, and cool too. Still, how “An Old Gunner” can stand winter night punting, for instance, in a double-handed punt, with nothing to do, and the temperature much below freezing point, with only one pair of stockings on and his usual clothing, is to me marvellous. He *must* be a very warm-blooded being: I generally wear three pairs of stockings myself in hard times, and ordinary sea boots. He, however, says he wonders what size these boots of mine must be; and I hasten to give the required information. My feet are 9½ in. long (rather small perhaps, but I can’t help *that*), and, with my seaboots on, my tracks in the ooze or the snow are about 11 in., or perhaps 11½ in.—we won’t disagree for half an inch, more or less.

My correspondent also said that he was waiting to pick up wrinkles. What! after twenty years’ experience! I might as well try to teach my grandmother how to suck eggs! No, *he* should give us wrinkles. I am not the inventor of wildfowling. I have no wrinkles to impart to such experienced men. I am only describing the sport for the benefit of those who may feel inclined to go into it, and who know not how to proceed. Therefore “An Old Gunner’s” experience will always be most welcome, and his description of his gun and system of loading, &c., is a valuable contribution, which I beg to acknowledge with thanks, and herewith publish. “An Old Gunner” thus says:

The gun I now use is a muzzle-loader, weight complete 160 lb. with a very short stock, nearly straight. This gun shoots 20 oz. of shot. To load I use a powder flask containing six charges; the end fits the barrel, which I load as I should a shoulder gun, leaving the flask in the barrel. I unship the gun, which is done in a minute, hold the gun perpendicularly, jar the gun once or twice on the bottom boards, and the powder goes to the breech; then I put in a shot cartridge. To ease the recoil, I have Hawker’s spiral spring, with a fore-and-aft movable knee of my own invention, made of red deal wood, quite light, with a block of indiarubber at each end to ease the recoil. I have also invented a safety—extremely simple, making it impossible for the gun to explode, except at the will of the shooter.

Perhaps "An Old Gunner" will some day kindly describe those two plans for the common weal?

In shooting, the gun runs back about 2in. Besides the relief from the spring, I have used my patent knee (as I call it) fifteen years, and it is as good as ever. The trigger is also my own invention, so constructed that it is impossible to injure the fingers, pull any way you like, with gloves or without gloves. A child can use it, without any trigger line or chain, which are quite unnecessary.

It would also have been a valuable addition to our knowledge if "An Old Gunner" had explained this kind of trigger.

In shooting, take the stock of the gun in your hand, and use it as you would a pistol, at either sitting or flying shots, and killing a single bird on the wing is no difficult matter. I have tried laying the gun, and using elevators and other complicated contrivances, and condemned them *in toto*. A sportsman ought to be a sufficient judge of distance in shooting afloat. I don't think there is any difficulty, night or day.

Here I beg to differ. This difficulty is precisely *the* stumbling block in night shooting, in my opinion.

But shooting in the dark at the sound is a practice much to be condemned.

Which is just what I said in one of my last chapters.

On a small sheet of water, it breaks up the haunts of the birds, and it is dangerous to other gunners.

Many writers on this subject recommend you to place your shoulder firmly to the stock when shooting.

Mr. Folkard does so, but I do not, in all cases, by any manner of means.

I should beg to be excused using mine in that way; the consequences would be rather serious. It might do with a stanchion gun with no spring and a fixed knee; but that, I conclude, is quite a thing of the past.

Here "An Old Gunner" is mistaken. Mr. Harmer and Mr. Booth, among leading punters, use fixed knees and no spring.

Hawker no doubt was right in what he says in his eleventh edition, page 372; I tried it two winters, and consider it a wretched contrivance; and I don't think it is used anywhere now, except at Great Yarmouth. If you prefer a rope breeching, which certainly makes a gun shoot pleasantly, don't have it too stout; renew the rope frequently, let it be of the best manilla, and examine it carefully before starting (which is generally done



in the dark), to see that no evil-disposed fellow has put a knife through one or two strands, which I have known happen more than once in my experience. It is a mistake to suppose you require a heavy rope. I saw one in a punt the other day of hemp of enormous size, hard as iron, and no more play in it. With regard to breechloaders—I mean punt guns—there are plenty of second-hand ones for sale; therefore it can't be the expense which deters the shooters from using them.

Here I join issue with "An Old Gunner." A second-hand breech-loading punt gun is beyond the reach of most *professional* shooters. That is what I stated. No such gun can be had under 25*l.*, whereas many muzzle-loaders may be picked up from a "fiver."

I have tried some breechloaders, and seen many, but not one that I consider simple and efficient. Their only recommendation is rapid and easy loading, which is not a *sine quâ non* for a big gun. The gunner is a fortunate man if he averages six shots a day. It can't be difficult, or troublesome, to load five times, as I conclude he would start with a loaded gun, and in a double-handed punt, the labour is divided.

In my opinion, muzzle-loading punt guns, labour or not being divided, are not only *difficult* but *troublesome* to load, particularly so in bad weather.

Of course, I scull to birds. Any man that can do so will never paddle, which is nasty, wet, miserable work.

This depends entirely upon circumstances. There are cases where paddling is the best mode of progression.

My fancy is not to wear any flannel at all, but gun in my usual dress, merely putting on over my shooting jacket a heavy light-coloured guernsey frock, such as are used on board fishing smacks, and one pair of long woollen stockings to match. This is all the worsted or flannel I use in any shape; and over all a cotton slop or "jumper," with pockets outside; a cap of duck with a peak and lined with leather, which is light and sufficiently warm. Of course I use long sea boots. I am careful with regard to colour; man, punt, and gun, &c., are as near alike as possible. I carry in the punt a light grey waterproof slop—not macintosh—or oiled coat, and gloves of buckakin, such as are used in the hunting field. Take an extra pair if you like.

Kid or skin of any kind is to be avoided, according to my experience, for single-handed work; as when wet, which the gloves are sure to get, they are a misery to wear, and moreover, when dried, they get hard and unpleasant. But evidently opinions and tastes vary on the subject. Neverthe-

less, the thanks of wildfowl shooters are due to "An Old Gunner" for his interesting communication.

The chief adjunct to the cripple chase, besides the "cripple" guns, is the cripple net. This is made of stout twine, with a long handle, and is of the shape of an ordinary angling landing net, only stronger. The best way to use it is to drop it under water, and gently but quickly push it under any half-done cripple, which seems yet inclined to have a few more dives. The bird, on seeing the handle getting near him, goes down, but only to find himself imprisoned in the meshes. The fowler should not attempt to lift up at once the bird in the net, as its weight at the end of such a long handle would be too great, and, moreover, the fowl, if at all lively, might scramble out. The best way is, as soon as the bird is felt, or seen, to be in the net, to draw the handle towards the boat sharply; the quick motion of his prison will daze the bird; then, when near enough, take the handle with both hands and jerk the net and the fowl into the punt, when the bird is seized and quickly despatched.

Sometimes the cripples and dead birds are on "saltings," whereon the shooter must then venture in order to pick them up. Now, there are some saltings where, in spite of all precautions, and even with the use of the best and largest mud pattens, it would be impossible for any man to venture. These "softs," as they are called in some districts, are so soft that they would not bear anything heavier than a web-footed bird; and even a dog, if sent on there in pursuit, will only flounder helplessly, and probably get smothered in the soft mud. Dogs, however, now rarely get the chance of getting lost in softs, as they are but rarely taken in punts at all. The modern puntsman, therefore, must do his own retrieving. Where the saltings are strong enough, he can land readily in his ordinary sea boots; but he will do well to always take with him the punt setting pole, so as to act as a "feeler," whenever the ground begins to feel queer underfoot. When, however, the mud is too soft, then he must use mud pattens.

Now the mud pattens of our ancestors (and indeed these are, to the present day, used in very many quarters) simply

consisted of two large, square, flat boards, which were tied to the shooter's feet with bits of rope. Anywhere where-ever punting is carried on, such pattens may be seen ; but I must say that they do not speak much in favour of the punts-men's ideas of progress. Anything more clumsy, more heavy, and really more dangerous it would be uncommonly hard to conceive. Firstly, you can hardly walk with them ; unless you are used to keeping your legs immensely wide apart, you are sure to trip yourself up or scrape your ankles with them ; secondly, the ropes fret you, and see-saw most unmercifully into your feet ; thirdly, when these pattens, by chance, get into a regular "soft," the suction is so great that only a sliding forward motion can remove them. Any attempt at lifting them is then totally beyond the question, as you can only slowly slide forward. Now, some years ago, after having a score or so of times got pitched headfirst, backwards, and also sideways in saltings on various occasions, and nearly getting smothered, in spite of wearing such mud pattens, I bethought myself that a little improvement would be desirable, and, in my innocence, I first tried the lids of two hampers. These went on well at first, but the wickerwork soon gave way under the strain, and I accordingly got another mud bath, "free, gratis, and for nothink," as my puntsman most fitly observed at the time. I may add, *entre parenthèse*, that he did not look with favour upon my attempts at improvement.

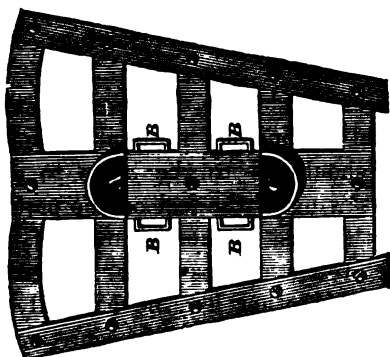
"Our forefathers," said he, "used 'em, and liked 'em, the old mud pattens, and why should not we ?"

"Ay, but our forefathers," rejoined I, "used to jog trot to market in a cart ; now we go everywhere by train, and the march of intellect *shall* also improve the old mud pattens off the face of the earth in time, or my name is not—" Wild-fowler." A little time afterwards some sportsman gave in *The Field* a rough sketch of his plan of mud shoes, which were in appearance much like a curlew's foot ; indeed, if I remember aright, the said sportsman signed his communication "Curlew." From that sketch I devised my own pattens—"Wildfowler's" own mud shoes (without which none are genuine, ahem !); and of these I append two illustrations, the

first of which shows the system of strapping and buckling the pattens on the foot, and the next shows the plan itself of the mud shoe. The material is lancewood. A and C are two



round pieces of iron to keep toes and heels in their places. B are the loops through which the straps are slipped. The



dimensions, for a 15st. man, I believe, will be found quite correct, as under :

Middle piece, 5in. wide, 20in. long ; cross pieces, 2in. wide, length of shortest 10in., longest 18in. ; side pieces, 2in. wide and 20in. long. Thickness of material, throughout, three-quarters of an inch.

These pattens will be found light, handy, and everlasting, with proper care. The straps are, however, to be changed at least once every season, if not oftener, because the salt water renders the leather quite brittle and rotten after a while.

When once these mud shoes are tightly buckled on, nothing can make them loose, the whole being so strongly put together ; and with them the shooter is safe over the vast

majority of saltings. No shore shooters or punters who have to do with saltings should be without such; they are light, portable, very strong, and their usefulness is undeniable.

Some professional puntsmen, to whom I showed my mud pattens when I first got a pair made according to my views, expressed some doubts as to their usefulness, because, forsooth from their make and material, they were springy! Now, according to my opinion, their great advantage over the ordinary flat boards lies precisely with that property. However, the proof of the pudding lies in the eating. Let lovers of heavy flat boards try my plan; that is all I ask of them. (Since I penned this, Mr. R. Fielding Harmer, the well-known Yarmouth punt gunner, writes me as follows: "I am certain of one thing, and that is, that no one now will use the old mud boards after seeing your drawing. It is very good, and I congratulate you upon it." This, from such an experienced wildfowl shooter, is most gratifying to me.) The straps should be buckled tight all round, and the toes and heel plates should fit to the boots to a nicety, so as to avoid any see-sawing of the feet on the pattens. This see-sawing is one of the most frequent sources of falls, because, if at a critical spot the foot slips on the patten just when the shooter is lifting his other leg, he naturally jerks himself backwards, and, if his footing is insecure, over he may go. With the pattens properly made and fastened, a fall is impossible from that source. There are, however, some softs which will not bear any weight, the flats being at such spots almost half liquid. Should a puntsman enter upon such an awkward soft, and find himself going down, however slightly—and this, through experience, one detects quite readily—he should not try to go on, but at once walk backwards, treading on his footmarks, not attempting to turn round until on sufficiently firm ground. When there, he can generally find a way round the treacherous soft, if he must go ahead, such as when a cripple is waiting to be picked up, &c. But, as a general maxim, no man should remain or venture on saltings when he finds that he cannot readily detect the marks of his previous foot-

steps, which are always plainly visible on the mud, whenever there is sufficient light, daylight or moonlight, until a tide has flowed over them. This, of course, applies more especially to strangers on new ground. Some local men, very foolishly I think, venture on the flats at all times of day and even night; but then they know their ground thoroughly well, and of course manage pretty well, as a rule. Nevertheless, many a ducking do these men get, of which they never boast, and not a few have lost their lives, or caught very severe colds, through exposure after a fall in the mud, at night, when they should have been peacefully resting in their punts, wrapped up in warm clothing, or else have been at home. My advice is not to go, on any terms, on saltings when it is pitch dark. One may, however, get there into trouble at any other time; and in case of a fall in the ooze, the best way to get out of it, according to my experience, is to lie flat on one's back, to put the gun at half-cock and place it flat on the ground, then lean one hand on the stock and the other on the setting pole (also laid flat on the mud), until one of the feet can be brought under the body, when, with a jerk, the sportsman can regain his feet. If he has no setting pole, he should place his gun down, divest himself of his coat, fold it up, double or treble, and sit on it; then he can bring his feet under him, and, by resting his hands behind him on the coat, he can help his rise with tolerable security. The coat, naturally, will be in a most filthy state, but that is better than losing one's life, I fancy; and if a man objects to soiling his clothes, he has no earthly business to go wildfowl shooting at all, and especially on saltings. There are some parts of softs into which, if a man does fall, no escape without help is possible; but these bits of softs are rarely got into by any but rash and inexperienced men, for, one can pretty easily tell, by the feeling of the ground under foot, when the ooze is getting dangerous. It is, therefore, only men blinded by their eagerness who deliberately will run into such danger. Once, years ago, when I was foolish and more than eager, I did it so well, that had I not, in the nick of time, been picked up by two puntsmen, "Wildfowler" would never have been able

to pen this. When found, the ooze was up to my mouth. It served me right, though. *Ergo*, never venture ahead without feeling with the setting pole (or, for want of it, the stock of your gun) the mud before you, and if you do get a bit too far, retreat at once, walking backwards, and *treading in your own footmarks*. There you are sure anyhow of a safe footing, which perhaps the immediate neighbourhood of your footsteps would not afford you.

Generally, then, when in pursuit of cripples on saltings the puntsman takes along with him the punt setting pole, with which he can not only steady himself, but feel his ground when it appears treacherous, and, as this pole is double or treble-pronged, with it he can pin down any birds which might try to evade his grasp, or knock them on the head when he gets near enough. As a "feeler," the setting pole is excellent, because the ring of lead or iron which is put round the fork, so as to make it sink when in use from the punt, also enables the puntsman to detect easily when the ground in front of him is getting bad, since the heavily-leaded prong will readily go down in a soft.

When two men go together punting, one should always remain in or by the punt, for fear of accidents. Should they both go in chase they might lose their reckoning and not be able to find the punt, or both might sink in the ooze, when it would be a ticklish business for them to get out; whereas, if one man remains by the punt, he can bring the oars or the bottom boards to his comrade in danger, or throw him a rope, which, slipped under the arm-pits of the oozed man, will enable his comrade to pull him out. And, again, in the dark or in a fog, by calling to each other, the man with the punt guides back his chum, who otherwise might wander away, and finally get lost. It is really astonishing how easily one loses one's reckoning on the flats; therefore too much caution cannot be exercised. Still, with proper care, the dangers are really of no daunting importance. Whenever I have got into some mishap, it was almost invariably my own fault; and, no doubt, a truthful verdict had I been found smothered or drowned ought to have been "sarve him right," if the jury had known

anything of wildfowl shooting. In short, do not let your enthusiasm get the better of your judgment; proceed slowly and carefully, for "*Chi va piano, va sano*" ought to be every wildfowl shooter's motto, as it applies to him most forcibly, and if he only once neglects that golden rule, especially with a few softs about him, he will pretty soon get a gentle reminder which will indelibly, and for ever, stamp it on his memory.

There are two things which I have always advocated, as measures of precaution, whenever a puntsman, punting single-handed, has to land on saltings; first, to have a small anchor and a very long painter rigged on the punt, and when landed, the shooter should proceed to pick out the highest available bit of ground reachable from the main flat, and there he should firmly embed one of the flukes of the anchor. The reason for this precaution is obvious. Secondly, never to land without a pocket compass, and to note carefully how the punt lies; that is in case of a fog, or a down-pour of heavy rain or a fall of snow taking place after the punt has been left. I myself never go punting without two compasses. Both were supplied me, as well as my sea glasses, by Messrs Dollond and Co., of Ludgate Hill. One of the compasses is for the punt, and looks on a small scale like a ship's compass. It measures only, however, 2½in. diameter, and is exactly 1in. thick. The cases are made of stout brass, so as to stand a good deal of knocking about. A compass, when the shooter is in the punt, should be referred to only when placed astern in the punt, because if used forward, the immediate neighbourhood of the steel cases, and of the punt gun itself, besides that of the cripple gun, would interfere with the true working of the needle. With this precaution, I have found my little punt compass perfectly reliable.

My pocket compass is also provided with sound brass cases. It measures 1½in. diameter, and is only a little over three-eighths of an inch thick, thus going into my waistcoat pocket without any trouble. Now, these compasses rarely come in for very frequent use, but when they do, they come mighty handy in times of emergency. At night, without such, and without some fusees, it is anything but easy in large estuaries to know



which way to steer, particularly when dirty weather sets in. Some men go punting anywhere and anyhow, and they, themselves, alone can tell what hardships they have to put up with when they lose their reckoning, and have to wait until day-break for some landmarks. It is therefore far more prudent to provide against all such contingencies. Maps should also be procured (the Ordnance are the best), and they should be well studied at home, and also referred to in the punt in day-time. The information thus gleaned is of the first importance, especially when a man goes alone on his trips in places which are not very familiar to him.

A powerful sea glass is also of some importance—more especially to the amateur who does not so much care for heavy shots as for collecting rare specimens. Thus it will often occur that rare birds do turn up, which, by the aid of his glass, the shooter recognises a long way off in day time. He can then work up to them, when he might have thought them belonging to the "common herd" had he used his eyes without any artificial aid. Besides which, a powerful glass will show landmarks very distinctly at a tremendous distance, and anything on the water, if there is any light about ahead, can pretty soon be made out. I do not know if *all* puntsmen resort to the use of glasses, but certainly most amateurs do, and quite right too. Even if not required for actual shooting, they are useful in observing the manners and ways of seafowl and wildfowl at a distance; and I confess having spent many very happy moments thus, in scanning the shores about me and noticing everything of note around my craft.

"Cigarette," I notice, mentions among his paraphernalia a telescope. Now, I have tried telescopes, but find my powerful Dollond binocular a great deal more handy. It is easier to focus an object with it, and it does not get indented and bent as a long telescope does. As regards power, I can with it tell the species of even small waders trotting on the flats at long distances, and practically it is far more useful than a telescope; therefore, why have the longer instrument, which is always getting in the way, and is withal rather unwieldy to use from a boat? On all steamers, nowadays, binoculars have sup-

planted telescopes, and I have given up telescopes long ago for punting. Some men who go on long trips take an aneroid barometer with them, and when it is a reliable one, it is certainly of some use; but, as a rule, one can, from experience, pretty well judge from the appearance of the sky and sea what to expect of the weather. The precaution, however, is a good one. The "tool" outfit then for a puntsman who wishes to do things in good style should consist of: 1, a breech-loading punt gun, its cap, and its ammunition case; 2, a cripple gun and its ammunition, together with a hand extractor—Messrs. Thornhill's (of 144, New Bond Street) knife and 12 or 16-bore extractor combined I have found most handy,—some tow, and a small screwdriver, and a ramrod (in case the extractor slipped over a case, so as to be able to unscrew the extractor and shove the cartridge out); 3, a boat and a pocket compasses; 4, a sea glass; 5, an aneroid barometer; 6, a map; 7, a cushion; 8, a pair of mud pattens; 9, a setting pole; 10, a pair of paddles or a scull; 11, a pair of oars, or sometimes a double-handed paddle which some men use as if canoeing; 12, mast and sail, of course come "without saying;" 13, a landing net of large mesh and fine twine. The hoop and handle should be made of ash; 14, a baler; 15, a large sponge for mopping out the punt, or, what is still better, the dodge suggested by a correspondent, viz.: A large sponge is a very good thing for the purpose, but sponges are very expensive, and soon break to pieces with rough work. I had bags made of open canvas (such as is used by ladies for Berlin-wool work), and filled these bags with small pieces of sponge, which I obtained from the dealers at a small cost. The bags were then firmly sewn up. They would stand any amount of wringing, a process which would ruin an ordinary sponge in a day.

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## CHAPTER XX.

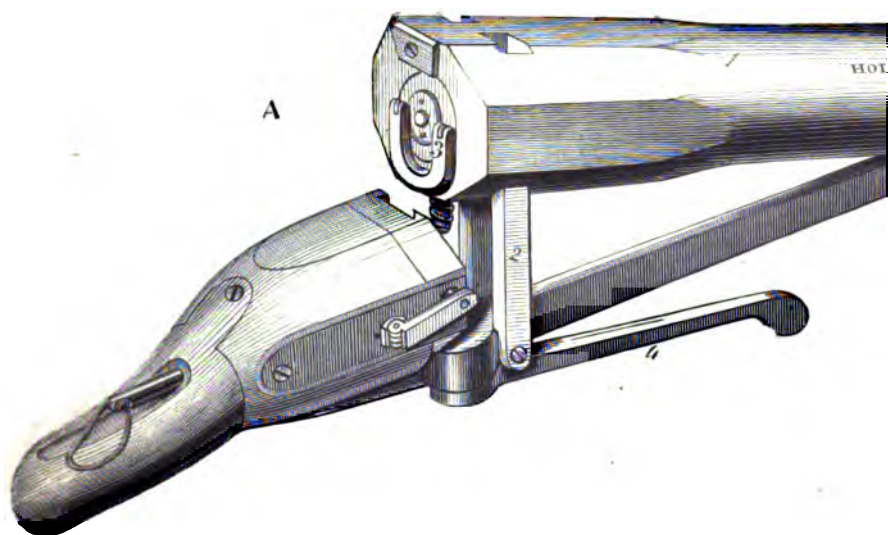
### PUNTING—(*Continued*).

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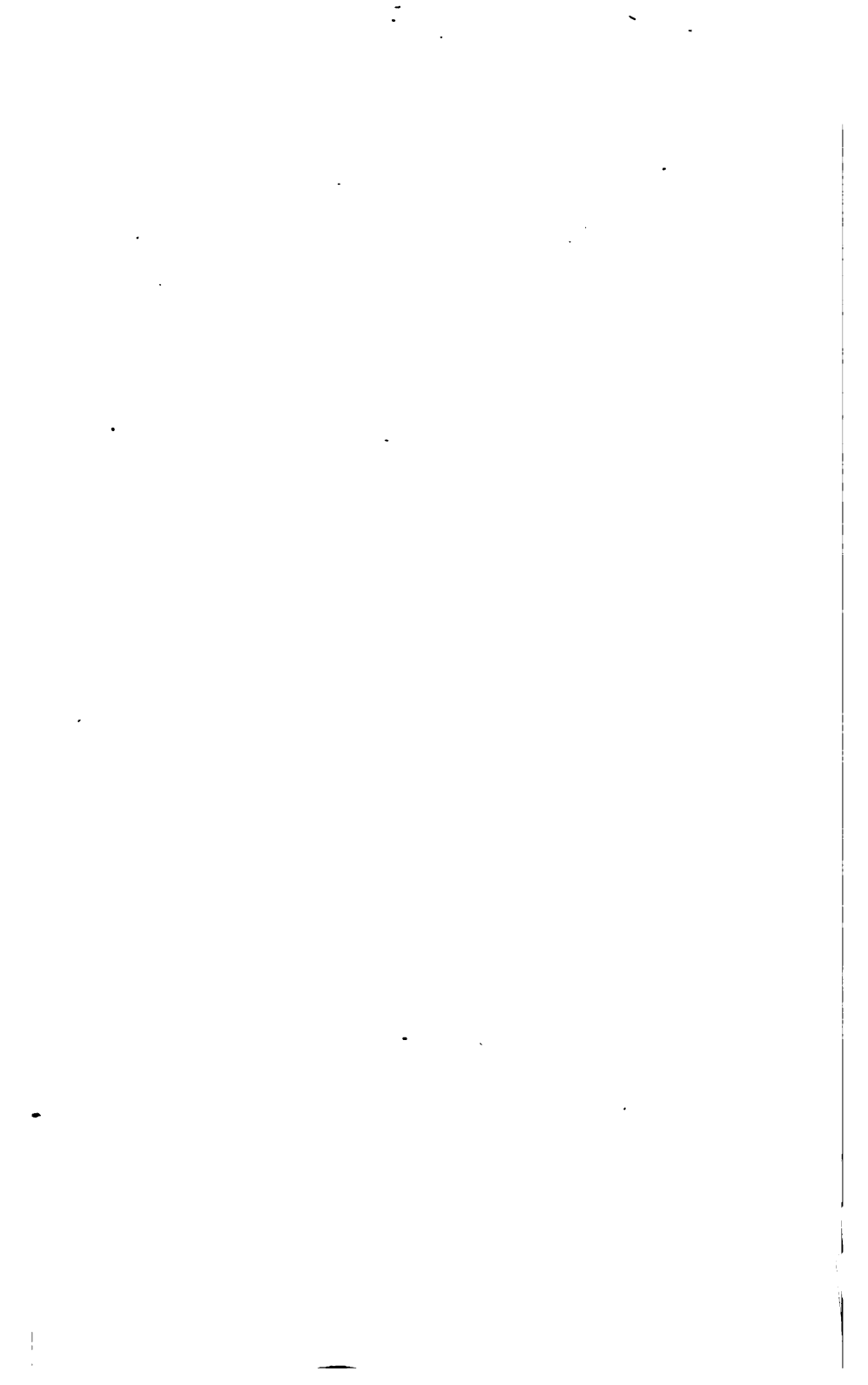
WHILST I was preparing these papers for the press, Messrs. Holland informed me that they wished to draw my attention to a new hammerless punt gun of theirs, and I went purposely to inspect the gun. The action of the gun, it will be seen, is built on Clayton's principle—as described previously by Captain Morgan, and illustrated at pages 40 and 41—but the hammer is inside the lock in Messrs. Holland's gun, and is cocked by simply pulling a string, and, moreover, the contractor is an excellent device. Herewith I append a description and an illustration of Messrs. Holland's gun. The gun here shown is a  $1\frac{1}{2}$  in. bore, barrels 8ft. 6in. long, and weighing just 100lb.

In Fig. A, No. 1 shows the gun opened, with the extractor inserted, ready for gun to be closed ; No. 2, the two solid bars which shut up behind the base of cartridge case, passing through the sides of the extractor, and, when closed up, make a solid breech end ; No. 3, the extractor handle, or loop ; No. 4, the lever which holds the stock up in his place, by engaging in a strong screw at the bottom of barrel ; No. 5, Col. Hawker's recoil spring arrangement, which is made of steel or india-rubber, and fitted with an elastic buffer behind the block to take the rebound.

Fig. B. shows the extractor (No. 6) with a cartridge (No. 7) in its two claws, ready to be placed in the gun. The small projection at the end of extractor is the striker, which passes



MESSES. HOLLAND AND HOLLAND'S BREI



through the extractor. The cartridge case has a copper or brass base, made gas-tight in the same way as an ordinary 12-bore case.

It is well-known that a great difficulty is usually experienced with ordinary breech-loading guns, on account of the heavy charges which are fired, jamming up the action, and making it sometimes all but impossible to open the gun and extract the exploded case. Now, in Messrs. Holland's gun, it will be noticed: First, that the whole of the recoil is taken—not by any hinge or breech piece, but by the solid breech end itself; secondly, that the extractor is so arranged that there is no chance of any of the exploded cases sticking; thirdly, the whole is perfectly gas-tight, there being no chance of the gas escaping into the lock; the limbs are nickel-plated to save them from rust; fourthly, the quickness and facility with which the action can be opened, and the gun charged or a cartridge exchanged, are undeniable.

Messrs. Holland informed me that the first gun they made on this principle of breech action was built by them for Col. Baker, some ten years ago. The gallant colonel used his gun for several seasons, and found it work exceedingly well. Since then Messrs. Holland have made several improvements in the gun, more particularly in the application of the steel screw extractor, which, I think, is of itself an admirable invention.

Any sportsman who may feel interested in the subject, and is desirous of inspecting such a gun, will find some on view at Messrs. Holland's establishment, and the guns may be tried at any time at their firing ground.

And now I resume punting:

In one of my last chapters it is stated that, when going to fire, the scull should be brought aboard, *i.e.*, laid on the side deck, as I explained at the time, which rendered my meaning plain.

I must now take this opportunity of stating that some gunners do let their sculls go; but these sculls must be fitted with a grummet, which prevents them from slipping out of the sculling crutch, and being lost. So far so good, but,

unless the gun is fired the moment the scull is let go, the scull will certainly slew the punt more or less, when its blade comes to lie flat against the side of the punt; therefore I think it better to get it aboard myself, and I always do, but many punters do not.

From a note which I have received from Mr. Harmer, it appears that he always lets his scull hang in the sculling crutch, but he never lets it go until he has made up his mind to strike at once the trigger (he does not pull a trigger string, but strikes directly his trigger—this by the way); so it will be seen that he agrees with my views—viz., that, unless the gun is fired as soon as the scull is thus allowed to hang in the crutch, the punt would, as a matter of course, either fall off or come up; hence the shot would be disturbed. Now, if a man acts as Mr. Harmer does—i.e., only lets go when he means at once firing, well and good—he may drop his scull; but, in very close quarters, and in very still weather, I generally propel the punt forward as vigorously and quietly withal as I can, until I am within a hundred yards, if I can get so near. When at that distance (of course I am here alluding to daylight work) I bring the scull aboard—i.e., lay it gently on side-deck, and pay all attention to the gun, the punt quietly gliding forward with its own impetus, and perhaps, may be, that of the tide as well; so that, what with the perfect absence of noise, and the punt's almost imperceptible advance on the fowl, I get easily within very short range sometimes; whereas, in still weather, however quietly one may scull, unless a gentle breeze is blowing, the slightest noise of the sculling may be detected by the wary fowl, and they only give you a long and straggling shot.

On the other hand, it is clear that if a breeze is blowing, or a tide running, *against* the craft, the fact of letting go the scull at all, until near enough to actually fire, would be simply suicidal, since the "way" on the punt would be nullified almost directly by the wind and tide; *ergo*, one would lose ground instead of gaining any, and that would be anything but workmanlike. It should be always taken as a motto

that, with a breeze in your teeth, and a tide running against you, you should scull, or paddle, or pole, until the fowl actually are rising before your craft. Why? Simply (1) because you must keep on going if you do not wish to go astern; and (2) the fowl always rise against the wind; hence you will have plenty of time when they crowd, or put up their heads, to get ready.

Now beginners (I was no exception myself) are always bungling that work. Seeing the fowl so near them sometimes makes them lose their wits, and they fire, when, in reality, there was no occasion to hurry for two or three or more seconds, when their shot would have done three or four times more execution. But the sight of so many fowl sitting there in front of you on the sea is so intoxicating that very few young fowlers have sufficient self-possession to wait until they rise.

Now, when fowl are sitting on the briny, they do not give nearly as good a hitting mark as when they are just spreading their pinions for rising; hence, not near so many are killed when sitting as would have been bagged had the gunner waited for their rising. As to the theory put forth by some men, that the birds are harder to kill when sitting—*i.e.*, that the shot does not go into them so readily—it is all nonsense, and such men must have but little knowledge of the driving power of a punt gun. Anything within the sweep of its shot, up to 120 yards at least—if the gun is properly aimed when fired—is either killed or disabled, no matter whether sitting or flying, but, of course, the wider the marks given, the more the pellets tell on the birds; hence the obvious desirability of just letting them get up. But I have no hesitation in saying that this “waiting until they rise” is the chief stumbling block in the way of success for many gunners, both young and old. A sort of trepidation comes over one just in the nick of time, and one sees the birds rising (in one’s imagination) when they are actually without any thought of it—as yet. For a long time I could not bring myself to wait. I would fire as soon as I was near enough to do so; I somehow could not help myself.



Some game shooters will thereupon probably smile at this ; but I think such excitement may well be overlooked when we take into consideration that, even when partridge shooting, many men get so nervous at seeing a pointer or a setter on point that they blaze away, heaven knows where, and their "hearts are in their mouths," as the saying goes. Well, then, if a man—perhaps a great political man, with the fate of nations in his hands, and a really great man in his official capacity—gets in such a "blue funk" for only a brace of birds—well, all I can say is, any nervousness on the part of any young punter, who is practically nobody in this world, may well be excused when he has hundreds of birds within range. I remember a man once who chaffed me most unmercifully because I was telling him that my heart had appeared to cease beating the first time I got within shot of a flock of widgeon. Well, of course I took his chaff in excellent part—"give and take" is my motto—and I am, generally speaking, as good a hand at giving as at receiving, in a friendly way. But when, two or three days after, at a covert shooting party, I saw this very man fire both barrels into the trunk of an oak tree, and "look all the colours of the rainbow," simply because a cock pheasant, rising under his feet, had nearly made him jump out of his shoes, well, I thought my time had come to speak, and I did so there and then, with the utmost glee. "Ah," said I, imitating his own form of chaff and tone of voice, "bad form, you know, *very* bad form to funk, simply because two or three hundred widgeon are before you ; they are only birds, you know ; you should keep cool. This was your advice, I believe, not very long ago, but it strikes me that your own 'blue funk' is of the most intense dye ; and yet a pheasant is only *one* bird, you know." I scored there, I know, and got no more chaff from *him*.

Now, I repeat it, the very first thing a punt gunner should actually learn to do is to control this inevitable trepidation, which will come over him when getting near his birds. I say "inevitable" advisedly. I have never seen a man yet, however *blasé*, who did not get awfully excited, and relish

immensely the excitement of the affair. Nay, I have known men in possession of all the sweets that this world could afford who told me that absolutely the happiest moments of their lives had been spent in a punt. I quite understand that—nay, I feel it, for I have experienced it myself; and he who has never tried punting has, I make bold to say, a treat in store yet, if he has only the courage to make a start. *Il n'y a que le premier pas qui coute*, and consider how nice a drawing room full of friends and full of fun will appear to you after the solemn but delightful loneliness of your sporting trip on the sea—why, the contrast is simply charming.

But, to return to punting trepidation. Just as a pigeon shooter must be cool and collected, in spite of all the loud betting of the ring, so must the punt shooter never be flurried, no matter what his fowl are doing. The man whose head is steady will do ten times as much execution as a fidgety fellow, and that is why old gunners, who are used to all the incidents of the sport, are generally so successful. It is not so much by their working up to the fowl as by their knack of firing only when *à propos*, that they succeed so well. Now, the sculler should either keep on sculling until they prepare to rise, when he should let go his oar and fire as quickly as possible, so that the punt should not have time to “come up;” or if the weather is still and the tide be with him, he should, in day time, if he is near enough and the punt going right, cease sculling as soon as convenient, bring his scull aboard on deck, and drift to the birds with his gun ready, and head, eyes, and hands “all there.” That is with a “set” gun, but if with a swivel, he may go on sculling right into the lot.

In very dark nights, or when it rains, or snows, or a thick haze is over the harbour, night shooting is well-nigh an impossibility. You may lose your reckoning; you cannot distinguish the birds; and, as a strict rule, they seem to be a great deal more wide awake then than at any other time. The fact is, you can hardly see them until you are too near them, and, in short, I have rarely done any good at such times; but, after a fall of snow, if the weather happens to clear up sufficiently, then a good bag may sometimes be made. In fogs,

however, it is useless to go out. For one thing, your punt looms out of the fog with the portentousness of a Thames barge, and you cannot get near enough to see where to shoot without disturbing the whole flock. Therefore a clear starlight or moonlight night should be chosen, and the wind should be easterly, but not boisterous, for if so, it will "get up a sea," and when the widgeon are afloat you cannot see them, owing to the waves rippling so much the water as to render quite undiscernible any objects on its surface.

At such times, however, if any mallard are about, and can be heard quacking, the punter should go along the windward shore, under the lee of which he will find the noisy customers, in pretty smooth water; but, for all that, he will have to fire by guess rather than by sight, as it is rare that more than two or three of the ducks can be seen. Wherever the shooter knows that any fresh water is running into a creek, or latch, he should make a point of investigating all such spots, even if he should hear no "calls," because it may happen that, in very hard weather, the birds are so hungry that they are feeding voraciously, and have no time but for an occasional faint call, which may be drowned by the noise of the wind. When one can hear the splashing of wings in water, one should get ready to fire, listen intently, and fire where he hears the noise of bills feeding along the shore, so as to rake the birds, which are generally spread and dabbling in the soft water. As it, however, occasionally happens that some shore men living in the neighbourhood, ensconce themselves in some ambush handy, and either use live call ducks (or imitation ones, in which latter case they "call" themselves), in order to decoy the wild ducks, it will be well always to fire in a line parallel with the shore, and not from the water towards the shore, for in that case the results might possibly be disastrous should some of the pellets reach any shooter or decoy man. And *vice versâ*: these shooters and decoy men should be careful when they see anything on the water not to fire at it until they are absolutely certain that they are birds, and not a punter in his craft. Such various mistakes have frequently occurred. Once a punter killed six call ducks at

a shot, and I know dozens of cases where indiarubber decoys have been shot at, and sunk ; and it has, on the other hand, frequently occurred that shore men have shot punters, and punters have shot at each other by mistake. That sort of thing is remarkably unpleasant, whichever way it occurs ; and, therefore, too much caution cannot be observed, especially when men are concerned ; but, as regards the decoys, live or otherwise, their annihilation cannot always be prevented, for how is a punter to know if they are real, tame, or wild ? Therefore, decoys should only be used on inland ponds, or lakes, where the owner is alone on the watch for wild birds.

The best time for punting to widgeon, *et hoc genus*, cannot be fixed by any hard-and-fast rule, as so many things have to be considered—i.e., whether the wind suits, the weather is favourable, many men are or not about, &c. But where no night work is likely to disturb the flocks, I think starting very early in the morning, so as to be on the spot just half an hour before dawn, is the most likely plan, and one most satisfactory to resort to, inasmuch as, if a good rake can be had, and many cripples are about, the constantly increasing light of day enables the punter to collect perhaps almost the whole of those birds which he would otherwise have lost—no mean consideration this.

Another thing again in favour of that time is the fact that the fowl have had a good night's feed undisturbed over the saltings, and they are all congregated together ready for their periodical journey to sea, so that if a shot is had at all, it is almost certain to be a heavy one, and the fowl will probably come back again to the district at night, because they were not disturbed during the darkness whilst feeding.

Whenever punting is resorted to, a good background should always be taken advantage of, to the very utmost, whenever practicable ; trees, hills, heavy clouds, anything likely to disguise the punter's approach, should be kept carefully astern, in a line with the punt and the fowl. Thus the case stands : first, behind the punter a dark background ; secondly, he is paddling or sculling in "dark" water ; thirdly, the birds are

always to be kept to his windward ; and fourthly, they must be between whatever light there may be in the sky, or at the horizon, and himself.

These rules are plain enough, and anyone sticking to them to the letter, and able to work a punt and a gun, should do well.

Dunbirds, scaup duck, tufted duck, gadwall, and golden eye are to be very differently treated to widgeon and duck, for the latter will not dive unless crippled, whereas the former will do so as soon as rise, and in fact very often prefer diving to rising. The best way, therefore, is when they are crowding together in the night to give a slight whistle ; this causes them to put up their heads, which they turn right and left, quickly, to listen, and if therefore—simultaneously almost—with the whistle, one strikes or pulls the trigger, a score will be the probable result, if they are not so far off as to dive at the flash, and so escape before the shot reaches them. One must, therefore, get as near them as possible. The longer the range the more likely will they avoid your load. Moreover, they belong to an extra armour-plated division of the fowl tribe—i.e., they are so tough that each one of their cripples will take ounces upon ounces of shot, beyond thirty yards, and look all the more lively for it. I have seen ten shots fired at a crippled scaup, from a yacht, with two 12-bore guns, and though he evaded a good many of the shots by diving, yet when he was at last picked up he was literally riddled with shot. Yet the last time he had gone down, after the tenth barrel, he seemed rather to enjoy the fun than otherwise ; but he came up “paddles uppermost” at last.

Ducks and widgeon, on the contrary, and particularly teal, are remarkably straightforward risers to the gun. Indeed, if they are at long range, and appear to be getting ready for a rise, I should let them have it a bit high, by which means they will just jump into the shot.

Brent geese are again a different sort of “fish to fry.” It happens occasionally that one may scull to a gaggle of geese in broad daylight, and they appear to have almost forsaken their wits. This, however, when it does occur, portends some

serious storm for the next day, or night, at any rate. How the birds know it is more than I can tell, but that they, somehow, are aware of a storm being brewing is patent to all who have had dealings with them, and have noticed carefully their behaviour. Indeed, when with a glass one sees many of the black customers "snoozing," with their heads under their wings, one may be sure that they are making a provision of rest for some protracted struggle with the elements, and they never make a mistake. Of course, among a large gaggle at rest on and off the ooze some birds will sleep any day, trusting to their *confrères* for safety; but when a good percentage of the gaggle are thus throwing their natural shyness to the winds, it will be soon blowing rough, to a dead certainty.

Undoubtedly, however, in ordinary circumstances, the best time to work up to a "gaggle" is when they are all "a-guzzling," i.e., feeding—either at ground ebb, or half an hour before sunset. In the former case, particularly when a strong spring tide has kept them away from their ooze for a goodish while, they are so ravenous that the moment the ebb begins, and the white water appears, they begin feeding so voraciously that the noise of their bills is not unlike the sound of the word "guzzle," repeated quickly. Hence the appellation "guzzling" given to their feeding; only, just as common fishermen will say, "I am a-coming" for "I am coming," so they will say, "The geese are all a-guzzling," instead of the last word alone.

Now, that geese, after a tediously long high tide, should feed greedily as soon as their fastnesses reappear, is readily understood, and that they should invariably get on the "guzzle" half an hour before sunset is quite as comprehensible, and reveals an amount of sound common sense which youthful sportsmen would do well to imitate. The geese prepare for their flight to sea for the night by a jolly good feed; and young shooters should do the same, and not allow their longings for sport to get the better of their reason. This by the way; but it is notorious that when a youngster is going punting he rarely can, or will, eat before starting. Somehow, the prospect of the fun takes away his appetite. I

admire his pluck, but I condemn his tactics, for one never does much on an empty stomach.

This axiom is evidently a fundamental one among Brent geese—and a very good one it is, too. Unfortunately, the wily wildfowler knows all that, and craftily takes advantage thereof; and, having taken his ambush in a creek, he watches the geese from a distance with his Dollond, and when he finds that the “guzzling” begins, he puts away his glass, and “sets up” to them carefully. Nearer and nearer he gets. The rearmost birds eye him distrustfully, and press a bit forward. He is quite quiet then. They after a while resume their “guzzling.” He again sculls ahead gently, and his punt gun is now yawning towards and pretty near them. They press a little closer; he gets nearer. They crowd; they put up their heads; some wings are already spread, and some paddles are skipping! They trumpet forth the alarm, and are rising, when boom! thunders the gun, and the sweep of the mould shot whacks the sea even up to a couple of hundred yards from the punt. The dead, the dying, the lively cripples are all there, whilst the lucky ones who have escaped scot free are sheering off with great indignation, dropping three or four or more wounded ones from their ranks as they go. Now, for the chase! It is getting dark; no time is to be lost, if the dozen remarkably lively birds which are making off for the deep water are to be settled ere the evening has quite set in. Scull, then, quickly to the outside birds, *i.e.*, those making for the channel, and polish them off deliberately. Be quick, and yet do not hurry—for, “the more haste, the less speed,” if you bungle at all in the “cripple” chase. And, moreover, never hesitate a moment to fire at any bird which has sufficient life in him to give you any trouble. Better give him more than not enough, for a wounded goose is not exactly easy to pick up as long as there is any steam left in him. As soon as you have collected all you can see, drop along the ooze, scull or row down, facing the west, and look carefully all over the water as you go. If you see anything like a black kettle bobbing about on the tide ahead, “set to it”—it is a pricked bird, and you will have it; but do not go openly for it, for it

will, as likely as not, dive, and lead you a long and perhaps fruitless chase.

Talking about "pricked" birds, it is supposed to be a remarkable thing that whenever a goose is hit, it is eventually found alone by itself ever afterwards. It is then presumed that the sound birds drive it away from their ranks. Indeed, I have been told by several old puntsmen that, when lying off the oozes waiting for a shot, they have seen the birds driving away their wounded comrades from amongst their ranks. It may be true, and it may not. If true, the reason might be that the smell of blood about the cripples is distasteful to the community, who henceforth look upon these cripples as strangers and interlopers. I, however, have never seen anything of the sort. I have often seen geese fighting or garrulously quarrelling, but I could not see whether a wounded bird or some food was the cause of the row; and, as regards finding lonely "pricked" birds about, may not this be readily accounted for by the fact that the hit birds cannot keep up with the others, and thus drop behind, the sound ones going on without them? I should certainly put that complexion on the affair. I am, however, ready to bow to any superior decision; but what makes me think that I am right is that many wildfowl, as a rule, sympathise apparently much with any birds that are hit among them; and such cases as sound birds dropping again near the cripples are so frequent that they need no enlarging upon. This, however, does not prove much, for, although the fowl may, on the spur of the moment, come back to their cripples to see why they remain where they are, it is just possible that afterwards the presence among them of a "pricked" bird might prove distasteful to them. This problem is not readily solved.

Brent geese are exceedingly hardy, and are the last among the fowl to get tamed by hunger. But, when thus reduced to mere skeletons, they are, when at feed, a most easy prey. In open weather, however, and when they have so far experienced no hardships (say in the latter end of November, for instance), it takes a good man to "get over them," as the saying goes. To begin with, they choose for their feeding place a vast flat



plain of ooze, and take precious good care that there shall be near them no creek or cover of any kind which could hide an enemy. There they repair at ground-ebb, and feed voraciously, but keep a good look-out, nevertheless; and, being all dispersed like, they are always very watchful. It is, indeed, most amusing (though vexing), to the puntsman to watch their demeanour. From ever so far that they spy his craft, one of them trumpets the call, which is not unlike a grunt, and they all turn round to look, and keep their eyes fixed on the yet far-off object; and if then a splash of the scull is seen or heard, off they go, with a roar of wings which is perfectly deafening, and a clatter of trumpeting which would do honour to a herd of wild elephants. When once they have been disturbed, they never afterwards remain steady on the ooze when the flow begins, but at half flow away they go, dreading some surprise, similar to the one they have received from the approaching tide. It is not a bad plan then to arrange two punts to work to them from opposite directions, as between the two there may be a chance of scoring; but it is a downright speculation, and, when once gone, the birds will stop at sea for that whole tide. Therefore, in my opinion, after a few shots, as long as mild weather lasts, but little can be done by punting at Brent geese, except in unusual circumstances and places. But in stormy weather, and in very hard weather, and particularly at the thaw, then the fun begins; and I have no hesitation in saying that Brent geese then give right regal sport, and their pursuit entails none of the dangers of night punting, as they are (except on rare occasions) mostly pursued by daylight.

When the wind is blowing hard the geese seek shelter amongst the flats, and can somewhat easily be punted to then. But, if the wind is only moderately strong, they will weather it at sea, and then they should be sailed to, in a yacht or a smack. The cream of the sport, however, occurs during the thaw, after a long frost, when a man must really be a "duffer" of the first water who cannot punt to geese, for the poor birds are so hungry that they hardly would mind a punt within sixty yards of them, provided they were allowed to feed.

In rough water, when punting to geese, the gun should

be tipped for a flying shot, as, if fired at as they sit on the waves, not more than three or four, if any, would be killed; whereas a cross shot into them as they head the wind, if properly delivered, will well repay the trouble. It is a mistake, when collecting the cripples, to try to hit them with a scull. The scull is too light a weapon; and, unless you exert all your strength in delivering the blow, and cleverly hit the bird at the back of the head with the edge of your oar blade, you cannot disable him. I find that the heavy-pronged setting pole is far more satisfactory. Once let it swing on to a goose's back, and that goose does not give much further trouble; being stunned by the blow, it is quickly gathered in the net, or by hand. The same plan holds good with swans, if they are nearly dead; but, if at all strong, it will be found infinitely better to give them another barrel each. Indeed, unless a swan be almost or quite dead, he is a very troublesome and dangerous customer to deal with, especially when the shooter is afloat in a punt. Its blows are simply terrific. I would not go so far as to say that a wounded hooper could break a man's arm with a blow from his wings, as I have read somewhere once; but all I know is that I once got such a customer in my punt, threw myself on to him, and I never had such a rough ride, either before or since. I could not kill the beggar; and, as he blinded me with his flapping, and we would between us have upset the punt, I let him go, dropped thirty yards off, and sent another odd ounce of shot into his "knob," which at last settled him, I was thankful to observe. Now, I never would get a swan aboard but when he had quite given up the ghost, and I would most strongly advise my readers to take kindly to the hint. Swans are rather scarce, and it is not every punter who succeeds in meeting with some; but, when found, my advice should be remembered. Swans rarely are to be met on our coasts, except when a good deal of drift ice is about; these birds are then, as a rule, most easily set to; and, as they are too heavy to spring at the flash and be gone, it ensues that even if they should start at the flash, ere their paddles have beaten five yards of the water the shot overtakes them and lays them low.

Colonel Hawker recommends putting "some large pieces of ice on the deck of one's punt in order to prevent these long-necked birds from seeing into it." I cannot indorse that advice. The ice makes the stem so heavy as to render the punt well-nigh unmanageable; it also makes her stern rise high, which is quite as likely to be detected by the hoopers; and the blocks of ice interfere with the set and working of the gun.

To avoid all these inconveniences, I would recommend simply using a one-foot deal board painted white, to be placed as forward wash-streak over the breech end of the gun. This board should have a round piece sawn off at the bottom to make room for the gun, and allow for its play, and by these means (1) the punt will be safe and will swim true; (2) the gun will be all right; and (3) the birds will not be able to see you. Placing blocks of ice on one's deck is a most dangerous proceeding, in my opinion.

Several plans have been resorted to by gunners in order to render shooting possible on dark nights. On very dark nights, however, sport is well-nigh impossible, as one cannot see the birds, particularly if there is a ripple, however slight, on the water, for then everything—sea, mud, and sky—is but a confused grey horizon. A piece of white cardboard, or a piece of wood with a hole of the size of the barrel, so as to fix it on easily, and cut away angularly at the top, so that the apex of the angle should rest on the barrel and the base be at the top, like a V cut out of the cardboard or piece of wood, answers tolerably well. Indeed, if two such sights are put on the barrel of a cripple gun, very fair shooting can be carried on. One of the sights should be about half-way on the barrel and the other at the muzzle. On punt guns a piece of black cloth is fitted with an indiarubber ring, whenever needed, to use when dark, that is when the gun is not set. When set no sight is hardly required, since the range is known beforehand, and no sighting is therefore necessary. Mr. Booth uses this black cloth and ring. Mr. Harmer resorts to a piece of hard wood, rounded at the top, and about the size of a marble, which he merely ties on close

to the muzzle sight. This, he always found, enabled him to level the punt gun correctly. "I have found this sight," he says, "even a good thing at first streak of daylight, when punting where high land shades much, and, especially when gunning in — Firth, I made many a shot when I should have been unable to see the end of the gun without it."

As a sound rule, however, we all agree, with the most startling unanimity, that shooting on dark nights is a great mistake. On such nights punters should give up their pursuit, and go to bed; by so doing the birds would get a haunt. Nothing bothers the fowl so much as middle-of-night shooting, especially when it is dark. Sometimes, indeed, the night is so dark that there is no taking aim at the birds by sight. If shooting is to be done, the gun must be sighted by sound, and here again we all agree that that sort of thing is very unsatisfactory. We all have done it, with good, bad, and indifferent results, as far as we could judge; but, in reality, it is like playing at blindman's buff, and success is the rare exception, not the general rule by any manner of means. And, since it also unsettles the birds, I argue that it would be much better to leave them then alone; and, in this view, I trust my brethren of the trigger will thoroughly agree with me.

For inland work, a punt gun carrying 10oz. of shot ought to be quite sufficient. For sea sport, however, 12oz. of shot ought to be the minimum load of a punt gun; and, in double-handed punts, guns are built now which carry 11lb., 1½lb., and 2lb., and more, of shot.

Mr. Booth's gun carries from 14oz. to 18oz., Mr. Harmer's 12oz., and the vast majority of punt guns range between these two limits. Guns which are built to carry over 1½lb. of shot are intended for special work—on the Dutch coast, for instance.

To resume, then—there ought to be two "sets" for punt guns, one for day, and the other for night work; in the latter case, a reduction of some twenty yards in the range will be found desirable. Should, however, then, a long shot turn up under exceptional circumstances, by moving slightly astern

the gunner will tip the gun to higher range ; but he should be cautious not to overdo it, or his shot will fly over the fowl. Guns that are shouldered, and those whose curved stocks are nipped between the arm and body, must be set a little to the right of the punt. Pistol-stocked and boot-jacked guns, and all swivel guns, must be rigged right in the middle.

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## CHAPTER XXI.

### PUNTING—(*Continued.*)

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It is usual for the puntsman, when he is actually working up to birds, if "paddling," to rest both his elbows on a cushion (or a folded coat); but, if sculling, his left elbow alone rests on the cushion, whilst the left hand regulates the gun, and the right arm and hand are busy sculling the single oar in a crutch on the starboard. Of late the leaning cushion, for amateurs, has been made of indiarubber, and is inflated at will, which is very handy. Formerly it was made of tow, covered with American cloth. A coat is all right enough in dry weather; but in "dirty" weather it gets wet, and, instead of being a comfort, it begets misery. The cushion should decidedly be waterproof, whatever may be its material.

Now, of all the birds with which the wildfowl shooter has to deal, I believe that the easiest to kill is the swan, when he first comes to our shores; and yet quite a sensation is caused in a district at the beginning of the season when one or two have been shot, the lucky shooter being henceforth looked upon as a perfect master of his craft. This is absurd. I do not deny that, later on, hoopers are apt to get rather wild—and well they might, considering the continuous persecution and pursuit they have to endure; but I contend that swans just arrived from the north are amongst the easiest birds to get near to, and that to praise a man's skill for having killed some of these, shows simply ignorance on the part of those who lay on the praise so thickly. Yet, go to any fowling district, and,

if you chance to converse with some of the inhabitants as to the skill of any of the professional shooters, they are sure to say, "So-and-so is the best man about here; he has killed a swan!" When I hear that sort of thing, like Artemus Ward, it makes me "larf."

Swans on the wing make a strange but very melodious noise. Once I had about a dozen of these noble birds circling above me slowly for a quarter of an hour, and, the weather being quite calm, I could hear this noise quite distinctly; but whether it was produced by the motion of their pinions, or whether by their bills, or by both wings and bills I cannot tell; but it sounded like a lullaby song to me.

Hoopers are exceedingly tough birds; but, of course, a punt gun makes short work of any amount of them in its line of fire, up to a considerable range. Ordinary shoulder guns, however, are "nowhere" with them, except one gets exceedingly close to the birds. I once fired a double 12-bore into a swan which was flying over my head at some fifty yards' range. The shot of both barrels hit him so truly that I heard it rattle on him like a handful of pebbles on a tub; but he neither hastened nor "slowed" his flight, and, to the best of my belief, he rather seemed to look upon the whole thing as an excellent joke, got up purposely by me for his especial enjoyment. But, oh! I was mad! I looked at the bird, and I looked at the gun, and the contempt I felt then for all things below cannot bear dwelling upon. I was inexperienced then; I know better now, and firmly believe that at fifty yards' range with a 12-bore gun, unless you hit a swan in the head or through the neck, you do not get him. I say advisedly in the neck. I killed a swan once by a lucky pellet striking him in the neck and breaking his vertebræ. There was not another shot anywhere into him.

Every winter a good many tame swans are killed, some by mistake, and others not by mistake, I am afraid. Both tame and wild swans, when adult, are white bodied, hence at a distance they look alike to the naked eye. But, with a good glass it is easy enough to find out the real facts of the case, even at long range, and if the punter works up to the birds, by daylight, when he is near enough to distinguish their heads

clearly, his doubts ought to be set at rest, as the tame swan has a knob above his bill, and is black there, whereas the hooper has neither knob nor black. Young hoopers are speckled grey, and at night can readily be seen, as they appear very big and dark brown, whereas the adult white birds might be within fifty yards of your punt, and be invisible to you, thus escaping detection unless they make some noise which attracts your attention to their whereabouts.

In daytime, if swans are settled on the flats in such a position that you cannot work up to them nearer than a hundred and twenty or more yards, it will be found very handy to resort to a rifle. Holland's rook rifles are most admirable for any single shots of this nature, and I can quite enthusiastically recommend them, as I have with mine performed wonderfully satisfactory shots. The best plan is to run up the punt firmly on the ooze, rest the barrel of the rifle on the forward streak, put up the sight, and aim deliberately and carefully, and so gradually pull the trigger that, when the rifle goes off, you are almost taken by surprise—that is the only way of shooting true. The aim should be just in the middle of the body, whichever way the bird is turned. The moment the shot is fired, a heavy shoulder gun should be laid hold of, for it is just as likely as not that the other birds, when on the wing, may sail by you, when you would have another chance to score. When using rifles over such flat ground as the oozes generally are it is a matter of common precaution to see if there is no eel spearer, shore shooter, or puntsman beyond the birds, as in case of a miss, the bullets might hit somebody a long way off, if fired high. For large single stationary birds, at long range, with a good light, and when ashore, I always resort to my rifle. It has the advantage of making but little noise, of being very true, and of bringing a little variety into my sport. But, of course, if a better shot, fit for the punt gun, is likely to be had, the shooter should eschew any such bit of fun which might spoil his more legitimate pursuit. Never use a rifle from a boat under way—it is a sheer waste of ammunition. Some men fire at random in a skein of geese overhead, when they may perchance hit one, or in a gaggle, where they cannot



go near them; but such expedients are to be deprecated, because the bullet fired in the air might prove dangerous to one's neighbours when it falls down again, and if fired at a gaggle and a bird is hit, you cannot pick it up. Then, what is the good of firing? It only tends to disturb the fowl; and the chances are a hundred to one that no satisfactory result is obtained thereby, but that, on the contrary, the birds, which perhaps might have shown sport later on, are driven away for good. In short, it is not so much *bonâ fide* wildfowl shooting that disturbs the flocks as that irrational "popping" in which certain amateurs delight to indulge, and which brings upon them the enthusiastic and unanimous blessings of the whole wildfowl-shooting fraternity. Never fire but when you have a genuine chance of killing, and all will be right.

As regards the apocryphal song of the dying swan, my opinion is that it is all nonsense. The dying swan fights to his last breath, and thinks but little about singing.

When punting to swans, it is very easy to see how to proceed; for, as long as the birds keep feeding, and their heads are turned towards different points of the compass, all is right, and they suspect nothing. If, however, they put up their heads suddenly, there is something wrong, and, if their heads are put together towards the same point of the compass, they are paddling away, and are getting nervous; and the moment they stretch their necks and spread their sails—which "crack" on the sea like whipcord—the punt gun should be brought to bear on them, simply by luffing her up in the wind's eye, if she is under sail, or bringing her up with the paddles or the scull, when it is pretty certain that a good shot will be had, as they are, as I explained before, very slow risers, and always face the wind. Swans should not be fired at as they sit on the sea under any circumstances, since the moment the shooter is near enough to fire they cannot quickly dodge his shot. And, moreover, once their wings are spread, they give yards of target to hit, which is a great advantage, especially at long range. The great mistake usually made by young punters when they have to deal with swans for the first time is, precisely, in firing too quickly, and also in firing too

low. The body of a swan who is "running up for a rise" is a yard above the sea. This should not be lost sight of.

Has anyone ever seen a retriever trying to pick up a wounded swan? I have once. I was tramping over a marsh which had been partly flooded, and was then frozen over, when I suddenly came on five swans behind a bank. One I killed outright, and with my second barrel I wounded another. I had a powerful retriever with me, and I sent him on to pick up the bird if he could; but he was knocked over repeatedly, having no safe footing on the ice, and the violent flappings of the swan's wings baffled him for awhile. At last he got him by the neck, but, so strong was the bird, that it was a case of "pull devil, pull baker," and it was the first time I had ever seen a retriever bringing me a bird backwards, both sliding in style by turn, as each got a safe footing. It was a very entertaining sight, but, had the dog been a young one, he might have been discouraged by such a beating.

Grey geese, grey-lags, or grey-legged, are a very different sort of birds from the Brent division. They are much bigger, look very much like farm-yard geese, fly low at sea and high overland, and do not go to sea to spend the night, as Brent geese do. On the contrary, they, and bean geese too, fly from the sea, or from the oozy harbours where they have spent the day, inland; and woe betide the green wheat fields which may attract their attention and receive their visit; for, once they have spied such a fastness, they circle and settle in its very middle, and they advance in a sort of circular way, regularly devouring every blade in their way, which deeds, as a matter of course, insure them a hearty blessing and a warm welcome on the part of the farmers whose fields have had the honour of being thus chosen and patronised. In England an ambush is usually resorted to ashore in order to circumvent them, and various stalking devices are also employed, but in Holland a trick worth ten of these is used. A large vat is buried in the ground, covered over with a flap and turf, a score of decoys are set about, and, when the wild geese come down and begin feeding, the shooters suddenly pop out of the vat, and dire is

the consternation amongst the grey-lags and bean geese. For a narrative of that sort of sport, I would refer my readers to page 272 of the first series of my "Shooting and Fishing Trips" (published by Messrs. Chapman and Hall). In Ireland and Scotland stalking with live cows and horses, or imitations thereof, is sometimes resorted to, with more or less success. At sea grey-lags are easily punted or sailed to when they have not been much pursued; but, once they have heard the noise of the wildfowl shooter's artillery, they become very cautious, and get but little short of unapproachable until they are tamed by hunger, sleeplessness, and fatigue. Let a hard frost occur, and should it last long enough, and be accompanied by stormy weather, and the grey-lags once again are come-at-able. They carry a good deal of shot, generally speaking, but I have an idea that they give up the ghost more readily than Brent geese. One of the most favourable positions for both Brent, bean, and grey-lag shooting, according to my views, consists in choosing, at the mouth of an estuary, the most likely place of passage for the birds on their way to and from the sea, and by getting in ambush on land, if a sea-wall is available, or in a punt in a latch, if one is handy, just about half an hour before sunset, and waiting patiently with a hard-driving and sturdy shoulder gun, great execution can be done. About a quarter of an hour before sunset the bean geese and grey-lags get under way, and fly generally at the height of about forty or fifty yards over the ooze, thus giving a good chance to the gunner. Were the gunner farther inland, he would find that not a shot could he get, if the wind is only gentle, because as soon as grey-lags near the mainland, they rise at once to a great height, and are thus beyond range; but, if a strong wind is blowing, they often fly quite low, and literally top the sea-walls. If then a gunner chances to be in hiding just there, he will have some fun with them; but the chances are certainly much greater in favour of the shooter who is in hiding in a punt over the flats in their line of flight. If the harbour is a very quiet one, it is not unusual for the punter in ambush in a latch to find two different sets of shots. From seawards he gets grey-lags,

bernicles, bean geese, widgeon, duck, teal, pintail, scaup, and tufted ducks; and from the harbour, flying seawards, he will get Brent geese and golden-eyes, &c. Thus, he will have plenty to do if the locality is a good one. On the wing, each tribe has some peculiarity. Grey-lags have nothing very characteristic in their personal appearance beyond size—they are the largest of all geese species, but their common flight is peculiar. They sail either in a line, if only a few birds are together, or in V-shape fashion if there are many of them, and especially if a strong wind is blowing. Now and then the leader drops back, and the next to him takes his place, with a regularity and a precision which are simply admirable, and the wedge shape of their troop thus “cuts” the wind, so to speak, and eases the labour of all. When feeding, they “talk” a great deal among themselves. One of them opens, and says, through its nose seemingly, “grunt! grunt!” and the others forthwith repeat “grunt! grunt!” lifting up their heads, and looking about, as though they were consulting as to the likelihood of any approach of danger. When about to gather in a meadow or a field for feeding, they throw up their heads and half-fly and half-run, rebounding for three or four steps on their feet, ere they can stop their momentum and make their footing good; and the same thing occurs in inverse ratio when they want to rise—they throw themselves on their pinions with necks outstretched, and run, springing at each step on their feet, until they have gathered sufficient way to make good their flight. Hence, if a man is then within range of them, he need not hurry his fire, for they cannot rise right up, like teal for instance, and he will have plenty of time to do the deed, and can aim very deliberately. Once started, and fairly on the wing, however, good allowance must be made for their great speed, and by aiming a couple of yards in front of them, sometimes one will but just reach them. Hence, they are very often missed under the latter circumstances. I remember once seeing a flock at feed, and my friend went in ambush in a quarry hard by, whilst I waited until he was ready; then I stalked the lot, killed one, and to my delight, I saw that the whole flock were going towards my friend. He, however,

blazed away, and did not get one, shooting behind two of them with both barrels. That was riling.

Bean geese are shot in the same districts as the grey-lags, and they behave very much alike in their motions; but they should be pursued more keenly, because they are apt to shift their quarters very rapidly. Like snipe, they may be in one's district one day, and the next not one is to be seen if hard weather should intervene. One can always tell where they are if there is but little wind, for they are continually on the "cackle;" and when they all clamour together when feeding in the evening in the green fields there is no mistaking the sound for anything else. Grey-lags and bean geese are thus very apt to betray their whereabouts; but little can be done with them except from an ambush, or by sailing to them at sea.

Bernicle geese also go to feed inland, and are to be shot in the same manner as grey-lags and bean geese; but they are not near so good eating as either grey-lags or Brent geese. They are very watchful at sea, and from ever so far, when they are on and off the flat coasts, they will sheer off at the slightest unusual sight or noise. Hence they are not easily set to; but when they chance to be at sea in a part of the coast where there is a good deal of traffic in steamers, ships, smacks, &c., they soon get so used to seeing vessels about that they rarely take any notice of them beyond swimming away from them when they press on them too much, or they chance to be in their road. Hence, at the beginning of the season, with a sailing punt, dinghy, or yacht, sometimes a capital rake can be had at them; because, as they have not hitherto been molested from such craft, they allow the punt, dinghy, or yacht to get a great deal nearer to them than is quite compatible with their safety, as they soon find out to their cost.

But, after three or four shots have been had at a gaggle, the said gaggle begins "to smell a rat," even when a fishing smack, *bonâ fide*, is getting near them; hence, the trick must now be altered, and, instead of gently sailing up by them, as though no harm was meant, the shooters should have recourse to a fast-sailing cutter, and sail her on and off, until

they are able to come close up to their lee at a rush, when, by luffing, they are enabled to fire into them as they rise. Great bags are made by that dodge, and also by sailing to windward of them; but the helmsman must know what he is about, handle the craft well, and know his soundings, for, if he should run her over the flats at a spring tide, and she were left there by the ebb, why it would be anything but pleasant for all parties concerned. One of the most bothering places I know of in that respect is along the east coast, off Tillingham main, where suddenly one finds only a foot of water, after sailing in twenty fathom or more; so that, unless one knows the place thoroughly well, one is apt to get into a mess from which no escape is possible without running great risks. At the same time, with a good local pilot, a good deal of sport can be had in perfect safety, but the pilot should be absolutely supreme in command as far as the navigation of the craft is concerned. Bernicle geese were supposed to be generated from barnacles. Like Topsy, they were not born, they "grewed." Hence the name given them; but why old naturalists should have jumped to that conclusion, because these geese are apt to swim alongside pieces of wreck when the latter are covered with barnacles, is simply incomprehensible; one might as well say that dogs are born of rotten flesh because they are apt, when hungry, to forage in dust heaps and refuse for stale meat.

To resume, then, the habits of wild geese. Brent geese feed in harbours by day and fly to sea at dusk; grey-lags, bernicles, and bean geese remain at sea all day, and fly to meadows and green fields at dusk. Laughing or white-fronted geese are at sea in day time, and in the estuaries of rivers, or in lakes near the harbours, by night. Pink-footed geese are found everywhere in hard weather; but so few of them and of the laughing geese turn up, that they are rarely shot in any quantities.

The various styles of flight of wildfowl, their different attitudes on the water, and their "calls" should be carefully studied by the young punter; and he will find that when competent, he will be spared many a troublesome journey if

he can make them out at long distances. Thus it frequently occurs that when the weather is remarkably mild and the nights very quiet, large flocks of seagulls remain in harbours and estuaries for the night, instead of wending their way back to their haunts as usual. By their intuitive knowledge they are aware that no atmospheric disturbances are likely to occur for some time to come, and accordingly they take things easy; and one may see them sometimes covering a very large extent of water, sleeping and keeping together in conscious security. Now, a professed shooter who happens to come by goes on his way, and does not even disturb them. In fact, the great secret of success in wildfowl shooting consists in doing things very quietly, silently, effectively; and no birds of whatever species should be disturbed, if you do not want them, if you can possibly help it. Well, then, seeing a flock of seagulls on his way, the punter should go by gently, and proceed after his legitimate game. But should an inexperienced man turn up, what a change comes o'er the scene! From ever so far that he sees the birds he sets to them, and his heart is in his mouth. He does not know what they are, and takes them to be anything else. In fact, so excited is his imagination that he is ready to swear they are fowl. When near enough, he fires at the "sleeping beauties," the sound ones rise up and sheer off in dire alarm, the novice goes to pick up his prize—and he is disgusted, and well he might be. And all this occurred because he did not know how seagulls look on water. And the same thing will happen when a flock of birds is seen wending its way in the heavens. The practised shooter should be able to tell their species at a glance almost. And as to "calls," as no two kinds of fowl call alike, the calls are quite enough information to make out what birds are about—if they only "open."

Now swans fly slowly, and on the water look enormous. Wild geese fly fast and in a straight direction, as though they were bent upon visiting a fixed spot and were taking a short cut to it. There is no mistake about it, geese don't look upon travelling as a pleasure—they don't go "touring;" no, sirs, they are bent on business, and the quicker it is done the better

—geese never go fooling about. Moreover, they are big birds, therefore, on the wing, anyone with his usual complement of optics—if they are at all sound—should know wild geese when he sees them. I had a short-sighted friend stalking a cow once in a meadow, thinking it was a knob of geese. Such friends are very dangerous in any shooting. This young fellow, by the way, always took a flock of starlings flying overheard to be dunbirds. I was at last afraid of him and recommended him to go north, which he did, and, as there was not a soul near him, he got on well.

Wild geese on the water appear very large, particularly so at night. Ducks never call when on the wing. They fly fast, and generally keep in line or form a V-shape. Their wings make a certain noise which cannot fail to attract attention if the weather be still, and that is the only notice they give of their approach. It sounds very much like the whistling noise which would be produced by many lashes of whips being switched quickly through the air. They go awfully fast. On the water their necks and bodies appear double the size of those of widgeon. At rest they are in all sorts of positions, some “snoozing” with their heads under their wings, and others ruminating apparently on the vicissitudes of this wicked, wicked world, and looking uncommonly grave over it, too, with their puffed-out breasts and bodies and their necks carefully bent over, S-fashion, so that they look as if they had a fur cape round their chests, and no necks at all. When feeding, however, which is always near shore, and in shallow water, half their bodies are continually under water, their sterns looking like gigantic “floats.” The clacking of their bills is unmistakable, and if there are any mallards they are sure to quack. Teal, also, fly in silence. They, however, only form a line, which is not parallel to the earth, but generally inclined from the sky downwards, as though it were a string of heavy beads being drawn through the air, and the hindmost hanged down like the tail of a boy’s kite. On the water teal are so nimble that they need not face the wind to rise. Accordingly, they spring up and rise at once without any turning, swimming, or splashing. Therefore



the shooter should fire as soon as he is near enough, and as they will rise at the flash they are sure to get a nice allowance of lead. Teal are often found in salt-water estuaries with other fowl, especially when the soft water rivers, broads, and lakes are frozen over, when teal must perforce visit the salt water oozes. The Garganey teal is bigger than the common teal, and behaves in similar fashion. On the water teal look exceedingly pretty. They are also exceedingly innocent, as a rule, and suffer accordingly. It is very rare that they cannot be set to.

Widgeon fly very fast and in disorderly fashion, as though they were always in such dire haste and consternation that it did not matter in what order they proceeded, provided they made all speed on their way. They also make a very strong noise with their wings, so that, even if they should be silent with their beaks, their coming is always made known to the watchful gunner. They, however, generally "call" when on the wing—and this, of course, makes assurance doubly sure—for the gunner. At night they appear as black as rooks on the ooze or on the water; and, in fact, they also seem then to be about the size of small rooks. This is very deceptive to beginners, who are ready to swear that they are not widgeons until some are actually bagged, and "proof deciaive" is thus secured. Widgeon are like teal—they rise easily and quickly. The moment they are startled or pressed, up they go—right up—and, unless a quick flying shot is made, the opportunity is gone.

Dunbirds, or pochards, when on the wing in considerable numbers, make a noise very similar to that of those enormous "murmurations" of starlings, which in winter time every shooter has heard passing over his head; but, of course, the noise is a hundredfold multiplied, and they come so suddenly over one as to startle one. This comes of the fact that as they are very heavy, and very short-winged withal, they experience not only some difficulty in rising, but must keep their wings going at a terrific rate if they wish to make way when once up. Hence the noise they make. They do not affect either the line or the V-shape flight, but rush on indiscriminately—pretty much like starlings, but much quicker.

Pintails sit on the water much like seagulls—i.e., with their breasts low in the water and tails sticking up in the air; but the differences of colours and length of tails are soon perceived in daytime. At night, however, it is not so easy, unless one sees them broadside or by moonlight. They are, however, rarely by themselves, but prefer the society of other fowl, to whose spirit of watchfulness they trust whilst they indulge themselves in a “nap” or a feed. In daytime they can always be recognised from ever so far by their curious habit of bobbing their heads whilst swimming, pretty much like game cocks when eyeing each other and making their feints. They are very easily shot, and if shot on the water, are easily picked up; ashore, however, they *can* run. They are not very hardy birds, and never face a sea; but resort to sheltered harbours and estuaries at all times. I have shot them, now and then, when firing at ducks or widgeon, and never knew I had killed the sea pheasants until I collected my spoils.

Golden eyes are rarely more than a dozen together, and oftener four or five only, or even less. They are fond of the ooze, and are not particularly hard to “get over.”

Sheldrakes (or burrow ducks), so called because they make their nests in deserted rabbit burrows, in downs by the sea shore, are very fine, large birds. When punted to, and they get aware of the fact, they try what swimming will do to avoid the craft, and they can swim—a few. But if the puntsman puts on a spurt, and gains on them, down they go. If the shooter then paddles towards the spot where he expects them to reappear, and succeeds in getting in quite close proximity to them when they turn up, then they take to their wings, but not till then, as a rule. They are easy birds to shoot when on the wing. On the water I fire at them as soon as I am near enough to them with the punt gun if they are sufficiently numerous or far off to warrant its use, or with a 4-bore shoulder gun if they are within range and few in numbers. At night, owing to their somewhat white plumage, they are well-nigh invisible; and it will often occur that a punt will be within thirty or forty yards of them and the occupant of

the craft is not aware of their presence until they make a noise in diving, or swimming, or flying away. They feed in shallow water, and when found there, and hit, they are easily secured, but in deep water they give a lot of trouble. As specimens of natural history they are desirable, as they look exceedingly well in glass cases when well stuffed, but for the table they are atrocious eating; hence, I believe, the reason why they are allowed to the faithful on fast days in Roman Catholic countries. Now, whereas the sheldrake loves shallow estuaries, velvet ducks dote, on the contrary, on the deep sea. They are exceedingly watchful, and dive at the slightest provocation, and even when none is given them, such is their wary nature. They are black-fleshed, and very bitter to the taste; I can speak with feeling on the point, as I tried to feed on a brace once; shan't try it again in a hurry, though. Scaup ducks are never in flocks; they come and are to be found in small doppings of half a dozen or so in all lonely estuaries, where they can be seen continually diving for mussels, limpets, *et hoc genus omne*. They dive at the flash like bricks, and clever is the man who, as Mr. Weller said, can "circumwent" them. At Cape Gris Nez, however, I once saw a fellow setting a net for them, and he got a score of them. The net was a quadrangular one, large, and held parallel to the bottom of the sea by a series of stakes firmly planted in the sands at low tide. The scaup dived to find their food, and many of them never came up again, being held fast by the meshes of the net. (A description of the whole affair will be found at page 132 of the third series of my "Shooting and Fishing Trips.") Scaup ducks are also fearful eating, hence their being also allowed by the Church when more palatable food is not admissible. Scoters (or black ducks) are also in the same category, and are caught in the same manner. When scaup or scoters are wounded they give infinite trouble when it comes to picking them up; often a dying scoter will let your hand or your net come quite close to him, when lo! with a dying kick, he is gone again to the bottom of the sea, and, whilst you are watching for him, his *confrères*, similarly situated, are getting away like fun as fast as they can. The

language to be heard now and then as used by scaup and scoter shooters is, accordingly, more "select" than "well chosen." As to killing them outright, unless you can see daylight through them in half a dozen places the deed can hardly be done. They *are* a tough lot.

Showellers are rare birds along the British coast, and never assemble in any large numbers—two, three, or four being usually the quantity seen together. They should be followed quickly and fired at either when they prepare to dive, or watch for their motions with the gun on the ready, and as soon as they give a fair chance on reappearing, let them have it. When wounded they are exceedingly careful to swim under water a considerable distance before reappearing. They never rise high in the air when flushed, but are content to proceed at a height of about a yard above the sea. They, however, make up for their deficiencies in the matter of height by that of speed. A shoveller, well on the wing, passing across a craft, should have a tremendous allowance given him; in fact, at least three yards ahead of him the gun should be pitched—if the bird is at a range of sixty yards. They are somewhat easily got at from sailing boats, when they give excellent fun for the gun and very good practice in sailing work, as one has to tack after them repeatedly.

Coots are what might be called the moorhens of the salt-water estuaries. They fly just like moorhens or water rails—i.e., with necks outstretched and feet hanging down, as though weighed at the toes. They swim very much like a tea kettle which should contain a stone near the bottom of the spout; so that when the kettle should ride on the sea, its spout should poke out at a sharp angle with the sea and its bottom would be sticking up in the air. In short, the posture is most ungraceful and undignified, and out of ten coots killed when actually on the water, nine will appear on inspection to have been shot through the stern; because, as their breasts are sunk, and the tails ride high, of course the said tails get the allowance. The best fun with coots, however, is to drive them up with boats, and fire at them as they pass across or over the boats. At Slapton Lea this plan is yearly resorted

to, and on the Continent for a five-franc piece one may join in the fun, in certain southern districts, when the coot shooting days are officially announced.

I joined once in such an expedition, and the following is a narrative thereof, which appeared in the *Field* :—

#### A COOT SHOOTING EXPEDITION IN FRANCE.

It is not often that it is given to a wildfowl shooter to see one hundred and fifty punts afloat at the same time, and converging together towards the same lot of birds ; but I have seen it once, and, in fact, the punt I was in formed one of the numerous flotilla above referred to.

“Where was it ?”—Why, in the South of France, and it was by the greatest chance imaginable that I happened to join in the fun. It was in the month of November, some ten years ago, and we were “doing” Montpellier, a chum and I ; coming out of the Museum, we were just lighting a cigar, when Charlie drew my attention to a flaming yellow poster, some two yards high and one wide.

“Hullo !” exclaimed he, “what is up ? Something in *your* line.”

I just caught sight of “GRANDE CHASSE,” in tremendous letters, and drew near with alacrity. The bill ran thus : “BIG SHOOT” (free translation for above title) “at coots, on Wednesday, the — November, over the ‘broad’ of —. Price of admission 5 francs. Millions of coots are on the broad. The big shoot to take place, weather permitting, &c. . . . Apply to the lessee of the fishing, Mr. de la Macreuse, à la Grenoillère, near Montpellier, &c. . . .”

Naturally enough, at once I thought it would be very great fun, but how the thing was to be managed I had not the slightest idea. We, however, went back directly to our hotel, and there the whole affair was fully explained to us. It appears that this great shoot takes place once or twice (but generally only once) a year, over every one of the large ponds or lakes abounding in the neighbourhood, where the birds choose to congregate by tens of thousands. For the occasion all available boats are mustered, and the army of flat-bottomed

punts which then turns up on the scene of action is something enormous. Of course, that is a great day for the boatmen, who generally make their own terms. It is usual to have two oarsmen for each punt, and only one shooter, who sits in the stern sheets. The terms vary, but it can safely be said that half a sovereign will cover the whole expense for the day.

"You will readily understand," the hotel keeper told us, "that a great deal depends on the craft one gets, and the boatmen that are engaged; and, if you are inclined to join in the fun, I would advise you to lose no time, but go at once and secure all you want, otherwise you might find yourself condemned to a miserable old tub, or else a negafol."

"What is a negafol?" queried I.

"Why, a very small punt which can only hold one man, the shooter, who, therefore, has to do everything—row, load, shoot, and pick up his birds."

"This would not do for me," I said, holding up my hand, "therefore, Charlie, we will go and make sure of all we will require."

"But," said my chum, "I don't want to shoot."

"Still wouldn't you like to see the fun?"

"Of course I should."

"Well then you had better come, and, if you don't care about shooting, you can load for me. Moreover, we shall have a jolly nice hamper, and, when the 'fun of the fair' is over, we will have a glorious picnic on the bank."

"That's not a bad idea!" exclaimed he; "I'm game."

And, accompanied by our landlord, we wended our way towards the strand, where we soon came to terms with two boatmen for the proposed expedition.

"Will one gun be enough?" I asked.

"Well, a couple wouldn't be amiss," replied our cicerone, "because, when the coots fly in clouds over the boats, it is desirable to be able to fire as quickly as possible; and, since your friend is going to accompany you, he could load your guns and hand them to you as quickly as you could fire."

"Well, then, I have but one double 12-bore here; let us

go to a gunsmith's and hire another. We will also buy some powder, cartridge cases, wadding, and shot, and we will prepare the cartridges ourselves."

No sooner said than done; within a quarter of an hour we had made all our arrangements, and at night we could have been seen very industriously at work preparing the ammunition. As I knew, from experience, how tough coots are, I loaded my right barrel cartridges with No. 5 shot, and the left barrel with No. 3.

"That will fetch them down," I said, with a grin, to Charlie.

"I should think it ought," said he, "and to tell you the truth, I should like to see you at it now."

\* \* \* \* \*

The great day at last arrived, and our host called us betimes, I must say. "What is the use of getting up now?" I feebly remonstrated with him, when, at an unearthly hour, he came into my room to call me, "why, I have just gone to bed."—"Nonsense," he said, "we are now within an hour of day-break, and unless you really make haste you certainly will be too late."

Hearing these words, which struck dismay into my soul, I jumped out of bed without further delay, just as Charlie, in his shirt sleeves, was bursting in to see how I was getting on.

"I say, you had better look sharp," said he.

"So I am told," I remarked, "but I will be ready as soon as yourself." Thus challenged, he bolted back into his own sanctum, and ten minutes later we were rattling in a *fiacre* towards the broad. Indeed, there was no mistaking our road, for, from the very moment that we left the town, we overtook men with guns, and mostly accompanied by dogs, all wending their way towards the same goal.

The morning was chilly, and we were glad we had brought our overcoats and a couple of rugs with us.

"Hanged if I don't take these into the boat with us," said Charlie.

"And a very wise precaution, too," quoth I.

"Have a drop of *Madère*?" interrogated he.

"Don't mind if I do," replied I.

Then we both took an "observation," after which we lit a couple of cigars, and resigned ourselves cheerfully to that rather dull drive in the darkness.

At last when we drew up we found ourselves in a perfect throng of shooters. I am sure the crowd must have numbered pretty nearly five hundred.

"I hope they won't kill each other," I remarked to my companion.

"I hope they won't kill *us*," he replied, emphatically.

"Let us hope not," I said, "but still it looks rather dangerous; we must keep our weather eye open."

"Ah! *vous voilà, messieurs!*" exclaimed a cheery voice.

And lo and behold! there were our two boatmen, who had evidently been on the watch for us. Without further ado, they laid hold of our hamper (which contained our lunch), our cartridge magazine, and the two gun boxes, and we stepped into their boat, when we found ourselves amidst a perfect flotilla of all sorts of craft. The tumult was extreme, the swearing prodigious, and the confusion worse confounded. The punts all pressing forward at the same time threatened to be jammed irrevocably, especially as they had to go, one by one, through a very narrow entrance, on both sides of which the money-takers or ticket collectors were standing. We waited a goodish while, whilst the defile of those who had arrived previously was taking place; but at last our turn came, and I confess I was very pleased when finally we found the broad expanse of the lake stretching uninterruptedly before us. We were amongst the last thirty boats, and our arrival was greeted with rather impatient murmurs. Our boatmen, taking the hint, plied their oars vigorously, and in a few minutes we were at our post. We then found that the punts formed a horseshoe line right across the lake, and we then understood the plan of action.

"Provided there be plenty of coots," I remarked to Charlie, who had turned up his coat collar, wrapped his legs in his rug, and was lying in the bottom of the boat in front of me,



so as not to be in my way when I should require to fire—"provided there be plenty of coots, we shall see some fun to-day, methinks."

"Hope so," he replied drily, "for hitherto the thing has been slow and dull enough in all conscience."

Which was perfectly true, certainly. However, whilst the last boats were getting through the pass, we watched curiously the behaviour of those "scouts" who had remained ashore. These were wending their way on both shores of the lake, and taking their stations one by one as they came to some favourable spots. "Decidedly the coots will have it hot to-day," I thought, and in this surmise I was quite correct, as the sequel will prove.

The last boat at length joined our ranks, and when we were all ready a tall fellow, who was pretty well in the middle punt of the horseshoe line, got up in his boat, and waving his hat, "En avant!" cried he. Simultaneously with these words, all the oars were dipped into the lake, and, propelled by vigorous strokes, we all advanced rapidly.

There was no wind at all, and the surface of the broad lake was as placid as a looking-glass. A lot of seagulls, who were lazily resting and pluming themselves, wondering at the unusual assemblage, rose screaming, and a flock of ringed plovers, taking the alarm, got up on our left, and swerving in front of my boat, at rather long range, I let them have it, and cut two lanes into them, flooring about half a dozen. Thus I had been the first to fire, and to score, much to the evident dissatisfaction of my neighbours, who began gesticulating vehemently, and using strong language.

"I believe they are swearing," quoth Charlie, negligently.

"Let them," I replied, laconically.

As we went on we picked up our birds. I was just in the act of nailing the last, which was floating past our stern, when

"Voilà les macreuses," exclaimed one of our men.

I turned round, and, sure enough, a large black cloud of coots was visible some three hundred yards in front of us, and on a narrow inspection farther on, another immense flock of them seemed to cover the surface of the pond.

"See them, Charlie?"

"I should think I do;" said he. "Why, there must be at least a million of them!"

"Oh! nonsense; if there are five thousand, I, for one, shall be perfectly satisfied."

"You must get ready, if you please, sir," said the head boatman, "for probably some of the shore men will disturb the birds as we drive them towards the shore, and a 'flight' might come overhead."

"Right you are," I replied. "Now, Charlie, open the magazine, and be ready."

But my worthy friend began to feel the excitement of the thing.

"I don't see," he said, "why I shouldn't shoot, too; now that I come to think of it, I rather fancy it will be very good fun."

"I know it will," I rejoined, "and, as you say, I don't see why you shouldn't join in the fun."

Well, this being agreed to, instead of reclining where he was before, he got up and came and sat astern with me, and what the boatmen had prognosticated duly happened.

Bang! went a gun somewhere in the reeds ahead, and lo! a cloud of coots rose, and before they could reach us about fifty teals and ducks got up too; but unfortunately, not from our own side of the pond, and it was rather "riling" to see some of them being knocked over as they flew by past our neighbours. I was just wondering why such luck had not befallen us, when about fifteen more ducks got up from *our* side that time, and passed right in front of us.

Crack! bang! bang! from our neighbours, but the birds appeared none the worse, and we had, therefore, as good a chance as we could wish. I sent a dose of No. 5 to the leader, and he no sooner got it than he collapsed. With the second barrel I winged one of the "tailers," and Charlie killed a bird; but all this firing did not put out the coots who had been previously disturbed, and who had evidently made up their minds to force our line, or die in the attempt. The latter fate a good many of them experienced, for, the file firing

that took place there and then was something to be remembered, and the birds fell like hail—to the rear, to the front, to the right, and to the left of the punts. It was really good fun—whether it was sport remains to be seen; but I confess that I enjoyed it, and it would have done anyone's heart good to have seen "Wildfowler" pitching into the "black" birds. I loaded, fired, loaded, fired, and loaded and fired again and again, until my head almost rang with the detonations, and the barrels got too hot to hold. The knack in that sort of fun was to pitch the gun well forward, for the birds were passing very high overhead, and at a terrific speed. This may appear strange, because coots, generally speaking, fly rather heavily; but when once they find themselves hemmed in between shooters in boats and shooters on the shore, they rise tremendously high, and then sheer off with the speed of seagulls travelling with a gale. Therefore, I need not remark that a good many of the birds were perfectly unscathed.

However, this "flight" being over, we all picked up the dead ones, and the "cripple" chase began. We polished off successfully three or four of those nearest to us, and we were being rowed towards a lively wounded bird, when the shooter who was in the punt on our right, next to ours, deliberately levelled his gun at the bird, who was right between him and us, but much farther from him than from us, and we all had just time to bob into the punt to escape his shot.

"Now, look here!" called out my friend, addressing him, "if you don't mind, you will bag one of us, if not both, directly." But he did not seem to mind us, and, as he had missed the coot, he fired again at it. Now, Charlie was never noted for very good temper and patience, and, on the spur of the moment, he up with his gun and banged at the fellow!

"*Sacré* this! *Sacré* the other! I am shot!" shouted the unlucky wight, holding up his left hand, into which it appears two pellets had gone. "Serve him right, too," said Charlie, picking up three or four of the fellow's shots in our own punt. "Oh! but still you shouldn't have fired at him," I was arguing; but the words were scarcely out of my mouth when

I got a tremendous crack on the back of my head. It seems that one of the wounded man's friends, having perceived the affair, had rowed up unperceived in his negafol behind us, and had hit me with his oar in this cowardly fashion. At this my blood was up too, of course, but, before I could do anything, Charlie had jumped into the fellow's boat, at the imminent risk of sinking it under their united weight, and was punching his head most unmercifully, whilst I was rubbing my own sore skull.

Of course there was an awful row, and it took a good quarter of an hour to come to an understanding; but at last momentary peace was restored, all the other shooters agreeing that there was no need of spoiling the sport, and that we could settle the matter afterwards. This being arranged, we again went on, except the man in the negafol and his "hit" friend, who both dropped back, and entered into a very vehement consultation as to the pros and cons of the affair.

"We will have to square the beggars, I suppose," said Charlie.

"You mean *you* will have to do so," said I, laughing, "for I haven't had time to join in the fray; nevertheless, I am very much obliged to you for the rapidity with which you avenged my wrongs," and again I rubbed my head.

"Ah, don't mention it," said he. "If I could only please my friends and pay my debts by punching other people's heads, it would be an easy way of getting out of many difficulties. But, look out, here are some more birds coming."

Somehow, the two punts to the right and left of us had given us a very wide berth this time, and through that break in the line of the punts the birds defiled like "greased lightning," so that I can safely say that, as far as the other shooters were concerned, this particular flight was a most complete failure. As for us two, what fun we had then, to be sure! We killed, at the very least, fifty birds, and must have wounded as many more. When the flight was over, we had time to look around us, and the dismay of the other shooters, which in the heat of the action we had not noticed, now

became clearly apparent, and then the truth dawned upon our minds ; but, as it was not our fault, we were not to be blamed for it, and our boatmen emphatically pointed *that* out to the others.

"You should come nearer," they said to those next to us ; and, *nolens volens*, for the next flight they had to do so. However, to cut a long story short, as soon as the wounded and dead birds were picked up, all the punts made tracks towards the shore, and our boatmen, nothing loth, announced to us that it was luncheon time. We all landed upon the bank, and a very pretty sight it was to see all the napkins and bottles in files ; but the meeting was not altogether very peaceful, for several of the shore scouts had also fallen foul of each other, and consequently very high words were being used. Our own antagonists turned up, and, mutual explanations being exchanged, we offered them a glass of wine, which they accepted smilingly, and we accordingly congratulated ourselves on having got out of the mess with flying colours.

Luncheon over, we all re-embarked, and retraced our way back, so as to give the coots which had gone to the other end of the lake a dusting ; but this was not very successful. The birds were tired, and did not care about rising, so that most of them kept diving, or half flying, half running, on the surface of the water in front of the boats. This was not nearly such good fun as a regular flight, and we got so tired of it that we were pleased when the day's sport was declared over. It was then about half-past two. The next proceeding on the card was the division of the birds, and, with this end in view when we landed, all the birds which had been gathered were placed side by side on the shore. Altogether, I think we had twelve hundred, which gave about eight birds to each boat. Now, this was rather unfair, considering that Charlie and I had killed at least one hundred and fifty birds between us. But then, we did not want the birds, and we were only too glad at having had the chance of killing them, and therefore, so far, all was well.

We returned to town as we came, our fly being in waiting for us on the shore.

In the course of the evening, however, whilst we were having a well-deserved dinner, and were discussing the events of the day, who should come in but the landlord, as pale as a ghost, and with a face a yard long, more or less, but especially more. We were both much startled at his appearance.

"Now what is the matter?" I asked him; but he was gasping for breath. At last, stooping forward, he said in a whisper,

"Have you killed a man to-day?"

"No, not likely. Why? Beyond what we told you when we came home, nothing else has occurred in which *we* were concerned."

"Well, then," he said, "the matter must be much more serious than you expected, for my cousin, who is secretary at the town hall, has just come in to tell me that a warrant has been drawn up for your apprehension, and the gendarmes are only waiting for the magistrate's signature in order to execute it."

"This being so," said Charlie, rising solemnly, "I think that discretion is the better part of valour. Let us 'hook it.'"

And we "hooked it."

Our luggage was forwarded the next day to England, and thus ended our adventures arising from the coot-shooting expedition.

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## CHAPTER XXII.

### PUNTING. — (*Continued.*)

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COMING back now to punting in England, on salt-water estuaries coots are very independent of each other when feeding is concerned; they each then occupy a certain amount of the water and feed voraciously, but at the slightest alarm they close together, and swim away at such speed that the pursuit is hopeless if any flats are handy, for they make for them at once, run over them, cross any number of creeks, and never stop until they are safe—and out of breath. When, however, they are flushed from the water, the flocks always stick together as regards the bulk, but should any of the rearmost or side birds find that they cannot keep up with the main lot, they at once diverge for the land or the flats, and once landed run like rats, whether they are wounded or not; in fact, if anything, I believe that a wounded coot runs faster than a sound one—possibly he has his private reasons for so doing. Coots, as a rule, remain in the fresh, or comparatively fresh, water parts of the estuaries until the frost is so severe that they can no longer remain there on account of the surface of the water being frozen. Then the punters have some fun with them, and particularly to beginners the fun is exceedingly attractive, as it is carried out in the daytime. At night coots are ashore anywhere when they can find some covert, and are fast asleep if not disturbed. They take a lot of killing, as I said before, and when only wounded it is anything but easy to collar them, and even when actually collared they fight like

demons with beaks and talons. With the latter they can slit your hand or your face open, as though armed with the steel spurs of a game cock; I therefore always hit them on the head with a short stick when they are in the net—it saves a deal of trouble and of fencing. If the wounded coot manages to reach the shore he should be looked upon as lost, unless you can give him another barrel ere he disappears. When coots are undisturbed their call is “crew!” When disturbed, it ends in a screech, and sounds very harsh.

Divers swim just the reverse of coots. The latter sink their breasts, and elevate their tails, whereas the former sink their tails and elevate their breasts and necks. There is no mistaking a diver in daytime for any other bird. The way in which he holds his neck, body, and his sharp-pointed beak at once plainly indicates the nature of the bird. To kill them one must aim at them as they swim away, and fire when they are just turning their heads, by which means they will not be able to dive at the flash so readily. They strike out their bills hard when handled, and therefore should be killed outright before being touched by the naked hand. In short, they, and wounded coots, and herons, and bitterns, and swans, should be “handled with care.”

There are six well-known species of divers. The red-breasted merganser’s cry is “cur! cur!” pronounced through the nose and from the depths of the throat; the hooded merganser, which is a very rare bird, as pointed out by Mr. Abel Chapman, cries “crew,” and is so afraid of man that rather than allow his hand to touch him, he will dive and die at the bottom of the sea. Goosanders are generally in couples, and exceedingly acute. They are large birds, and rather handsome, but better for show than for use, as they are detestable as food. The great northern diver is the only bird I know of that occasionally dives stern first. In short, it then sinks; it does not dive then head first like other birds, and, when down, only its beak is visible, and that is not much as a beacon to sail by. A correspondent, however, stated that in his opinion they only sink half their bodies, and then go down head first. Opinions differ it seems. Cormorants, however, take a



regular "header." Great northern divers are "champion divers" of the tribe, and will swim themselves out of sight under water. I have shot only about a couple of dozen of them, at various times, from whence I conclude that they are not exactly "as plentiful as blackberries."

Mr. J. M. Pike wrote on the subject:—

The northern diver can scarcely be said to be intimately connected with wildfowling; but an interesting subject has been alluded to—I mean the note on this diver's method of submerging itself, in which "Wildfowler's" description of its going down "stern foremost" is criticised. I have had plenty of experience with regard to these fine birds on the south coast in Orkney, and have seen their diving operations performed times without number. It has always struck me as a strange thing that there should be such a generally prevalent idea, which "Wildfowler" and his critic also seem to entertain, that the northern diver is a rare bird. In reality it is rather a common one. It may always be met with in our bay at Poole from October to March in tolerable numbers. A similar state of affairs exists on other south-coast localities which happen to suit—where an estuary runs out into the sea, for instance. When resting undisturbed upon the water, and not occupied in fishing, or suspicious of any danger, this bird presents much the appearance of a large edition of the guillemot, showing white on the breast and neck, and beneath the wings exactly as does that bird, with its neck shortened in floating buoyantly on the surface, apparently almost asleep. No sooner, however, does it become conscious of a threatened attack than its whole appearance alters—the neck elongates, the head held erect, and the body, by some mysterious process (not altogether inaptly termed "going down by the stern"), is submerged; the bird's appearance is then changed from that of a guillemot to a cormorant, swimming low and depressed, only the head and neck being visible. The next process is to turn down the bill, and the bird performs its exit exactly similarly to any other diver, such as a guillemot, only, if possible, more quietly, scarce a ripple on the surface denoting its departure. If wounded, or hard pressed, it dives much more energetically, with a powerful forward spring, making quite a splash at times. I suppose the secret of this peculiar sinking process is the expulsion of air in some way or other. I never heard it explained. The place to observe this bird is Orkney, in the sounds amongst the islands; there I have observed as many as twenty together. They are quite without suspicion of a punt, and I have often been within fifty yards of them watching them for minutes at a time. A favourite habit of them, on a fine sunny day especially, is to sit up on their tails, as it were, flapping violently their wings as though about to rise from the surface of the water; then, too, they will frequently utter their weird-sounding note, "le-e-ugh," long drawn as possible (a sound harmonising well with the wild scenery around); more particularly as the spring comes on is this the case, and the birds are preparing for their annual

migration. That is the moment for the punt gun. I must confess to having enjoyed many a good chase after them, more legitimate objects being conspicuous by their absence.

The black-throated diver is also rare ; but the red ditto, or loon, can be shot well-nigh anywhere. I killed three in an hour's time on the Blackwater once. They screech their cry in an unpronounceable manner, something like "krah ! krah ! krah !" but pronounced, like some German words, from the back of the throat.

To these remarks of mine, several correspondents did me the honour of replying. Mr. W. S. Everitt said :

I quite indorse "Wildfowler's" views that mud shooting (except for an occasional shot) is quite unfit for amateurs, and that launching will utterly spoil the best harbour, as shooting on the ebb inevitably injures it. I also observe that he is fully aware of the value of light draught. May I suggest that the head of balers should be made of wood, and scoop with a bit of old water boot. I am pleased to see that he has touched on the language of birds, of which so little seems known, or, at all events, has been spoken of, as the ears altogether supersede the eyes at night work, in which men only of great experience can hope to have success.

I have found dogs out of the question in a shooting punt, although very useful when carried by followers.

Carlton Colville, Lowestoft, March 17.

And, as concerned the influence of an east wind, S. S. G. wrote :

"Wildfowler" says the wind should be easterly for night punting ; why I cannot imagine. It would suit some localities, but not others. If the easterly wind makes the feeding ground a lee shore, it is bad for night punting. Even if the wind be light, a lee shore is bad ; the widgeon do not like it, and they are not easily seen on the edge.

To this I replied that an easterly wind always brings more fowl, no matter where. Therefore, with an easterly wind, one has a better chance of making a bag, as a very general rule ; but of course the ground must be taken into consideration, and S. S. G. then said :

The easterly wind, I admit, brings the fowl ; but fowl are not coming over all the winter, and an easterly wind does not take them away again. Therefore, in the early part of the winter an easterly wind is best, as "Wildfowler" justly observes ; but, as a rule, a sharp, clear night, with a light air off the land, just sufficient to ripple the water, is the perfection of weather for night punting—that is, if the light bears so that the punter can go up or across the wind.

I hope "Wildfowler" will not think that I differ with him simply from a love of contradiction. I assure him it is not so. Wildfowl shooting is a subject on which opinions vary more than any other kind of sport. Punters have utterly different experiences, and sometimes the same experience with widely different result; therefore, to make the subject thoroughly understood, their several opinions ought surely to be expressed.

That is just what I have all along argued. Some men cannot bear contradiction, or even a discussion; but that is simply absurd. I am always ready to discuss matters with practical men whose opinions stand, any way, as high, if not higher than my own.

S. S. G. then proceeded as follows:

A man who does not know the ground he intends punting over at night had far better be in bed and asleep. Perhaps some people will recommend that as the best place under any circumstances; but it is not the opinion of anyone who has ever made a successful shot at widgeon with a big gun. The best way to acquire a knowledge of the ground is to watch the tide flowing over it in the daytime; the punter will then see where the lows are, and let him, above all, notice where the piece of feeding ground is that is last covered by the tide, for in all probability the fowl will congregate there before swimming off or taking wing. Too much stress cannot be placed on studying the feeding grounds in daylight. Many a man who can kill fowl in good style in daytime makes but a sorry hand of it at night, simply for the reason that he considers that his skill in managing a punt, in knowing where the fowl are going, &c., is all that is required; whereas, the first thing to know is where the ducks work, where they will probably knock up with the tide, and where you will have to go to get at them, which knowledge can only be acquired by studying the feeding grounds in daytime; and this wants to be done frequently, for mud shifts, as well as sands, although not so much, so that the right road one year may not necessarily be the right one next. The most favourable tide is one that is just big enough to fairly float the punter over the flats, and the best light is a clear sky and a little moon. I have always found in very bright nights the fowl are scattered; and stars do not, in my opinion, give a sufficient light. Great care must be taken not to show the broad side of the punt more than is absolutely necessary; ducks have a great objection to it, and, if they do not go when they first see it, they will probably do so when the gun is again being turned on them. "Wildfowler," in an interesting letter, recommends an ebb tide; but one requires to look wonderfully sharp to get off the flats, especially if they are spring tides. Widgeon, as a rule, do not come to the ooze until some part of it is nearly dry, and there is then but little time to make a shot, pick up your fowl, and skedaddle. I consider a flood tide far preferable. The punter should get as much to leeward of the

feeding grounds as possible some time before there is water over them, try and find the whereabouts of the widgeon, and go at them as soon as ever there is water enough to float his punt. Generally speaking, it is a mistake to punt on dark nights; it banishes the fowl, and, as a rule, shots fired by sound are not successful. When widgeon are out on the water it is a most difficult matter to judge how far they are off by their piping, and I do not know of any rule for ascertaining when they are within range. Some people will doubtless think that one ought to know by the sound whether the ducks are 150 or 75 yards off; but let them try it, and they will soon find the difficulty. The best time on dark nights is when the fowl take the edge; then, by coming straight in at them, one can generally tell by the land how far they are off. It must be a very dark night not to be able to see the land when within gunshot of it. A raking shot along the edge is generally better than one fired straight in; but it is much more difficult then to judge how far the fowl are off. Another disadvantage of punting on dark nights is that you lose about half the fowl you stop, sometimes all, and sometimes yourself. Anyone who has lost himself on the flats at night does not easily forget it. If you have no compass (which, by the bye, should never be the case), and there is no wind or sound of the sea, and a fog, it is decidedly awkward. The punter will have to consider whether it is before or after high water, and whether the tide is running on or off the flats; then, by sticking his set pole into the mud, and holding on in the stern of punt, he will have an idea which way to go to fetch the land; but the operation must be performed often, for in all probability, after going a few hundred yards, he would be steering altogether wrong again. A beginner will do well to read Mr. Folkard's "Instructions on Night Punting;" he will then see how absolutely necessary for success and safety it is to observe certain rules. I have never yet, thank goodness! shot at a punt in mistake for ducks, but I have heard of its being done; and sometimes a very low punt does look something like a bunch of fowl. It is a good plan, if there is any doubt, never to shoot until the ducks open, so as to show a space between some of them.

Although I differ with "Wildfowler" as to the most advantageous time of tide to go at fowl, I do not mean to say that I am right, and that he is altogether wrong; but merely state what pays best in the locality where I punt, and he doubtless does the same. It is absurd for anyone to lay down rules with regard to districts that he has never punted on, in the same way that it is absurd to state that there is only one good style of punt or mode of working to fowl. I have seen Mr. Francis's and Mr. Harmer's punts, and they are as unlike each other in every respect as two boats can possibly be; but I do not hesitate for one moment in saying that they are both equally well adapted to the places where they are used.

I have used a Lynn punt 18ft. long, with an 18in. bottom, and I quite agree with Mr. Francis that they will drown a low broad punt. I have seen them do it; but the reason is, they have more freeboard than a broad punt. It would, in my opinion, be *vice versé* if they both had an equal freeboard.

Major C. Russell, one of the highest authorities on the subject, also wrote :

May I add to the very interesting discussion on the subject a few notes of the results of nearly forty years' experience of punt shooting, to me the most pleasant and exciting of all sports ?

As to single and double punts, it seems to me that anyone who can manage a punt himself would prefer doing so, and that by being worked to birds by another man he would lose most of his pleasure. It is like riding, as the Japanese do, with a groom leading one's horse. There can be no reason, however, why those who like it, or cannot do better, should not use a double punt.

I never tried sculling to birds ; but it seems to me that, unless very high bulwarks forward are used, and even with these by birds not quite straight ahead, the hand must be seen working across and across against the sky—a sight much more likely to frighten the birds than paddling with care and skill, the hands being kept close to the water. Sculling, however, has the great advantage of enabling one to use a broader punt, and it takes a great deal of practice to make paddling easy and effective ; it is very severe work to a beginner.

As " Wildfowler " rightly says, a band of metal round the end of the paddle blade helps to keep it down, and saves the paddle. It prevents the end of the blade wearing sharp, and so becoming useless on soft mud. For many years I have had brass bands on my paddles, which are made thus : The blade is of some strong heavy wood (African oak answers well), and is let into a willow handle ; two or three screws or riveted copper nails through all give plenty of strength.

If the right amount of metal is used, so that they are properly balanced, the paddles float upright like fishing floats with the handles out of water—not quite upright when new and dry, or they may sink and be lost when sodden with water, if the string breaks. My paddles are 3ft. long, blade 3in. wide, of the same thickness to the end, which is cut square. They last for years, are very light, and almost as easy to punt afloat with as short ones, there being no floating power below to overcome with the wrist. They, of course, cut through the water much more easily than if the blades were made of the same weight of lighter wood, and make it easier to avoid lifting the hands and frightening the birds. I have sometimes had a third paddle, 4ft. long, for occasional use, in one hand, when the water is a little too deep for the other paddles.

I have had a good many punts built in my time, always designing them myself on different plans. All answered more or less well ; none had sides more than  $\frac{1}{2}$ in. thick, and the thickest bottom was  $\frac{1}{2}$ in. yellow deal. The last was built more than twenty-three years ago by a house carpenter who had never seen a punt, and so had no notions of his own, but carried out my directions to the smallest detail. This punt has been used every winter, has done a great deal of hard work, and is now very little the worse for wear. She is 18ft. long over all, bottom 16ft. long, 36in. wide ; the

sides flare 1½ in., and are 9 in. high amidships; decked forward with ½ in. white deal and 6 in. round the sides; ¾ in. mahogany sides and bottom, white deal about two inches square to nail sides and bottom to, elm floor timbers, and oak grown angle timbers 2 ft. apart, all cut very thin and light, the inner edges much narrower than where nailed to the planks. All the wood inside above the water line to support deck is willow, and as little of it as possible. The punt is copper-fastened throughout, except a few composition nails at stem and stern. Everything I could think of was done to combine lightness and strength, as dovetailing the deck beams into a very thin strip inside the side planks. The chief if not only fault in putting together was unthinkingly following the fishermen's fashion of placing the grown angle timbers so that the ends pass each other from the opposite sides, an inch or two apart. They do this that eels when caught may have the run of the bottom of the punt, but it is a very bad plan for a punt used for gunning only; the ends of the timbers work up and down under the weight of the gunner, and loosen in a thin bottom the nails which fasten them. My punt began to leak in this way after some twelve or fourteen years' work. No such effect was caused by the floor timbers which run across in one piece; so, had the ends of the angle timbers been firmly riveted together, this cause of leaking would have been avoided. The bottom is quite straight for about 7 ft. from the stem, thence a gradually increasing curve all the way to the stern. The greatest depth of the bottom from a straight line from stem to stern is three inches, about five feet from the stern. I now think this spring too great. The particular curve was adopted to make the punt handy with a heavy gun, and it does this. The curve was cut out on a plank set up edgewise, and the bottom propped down on it before putting on the sides. The bottom is kamelled half an inch. By a curve like the wave line there are ample bearings to carry the gun, while the bow is so sharp as to be only one inch wide a foot from the front of the stem. This makes the punt cut through swell or broken water not higher than the punt, easily and silently. I would have preferred greater beam, but there was not room on the deck of my boat (not built by myself). The punt has light wash streaks, upright or very nearly so, which ship and unship very easily. I carry them, but never use them if I can help it. I once had a punt with three inches wider bottom and much lighter, having a very light deck forward only, and hardly any timbers. The sides were low, and it was the fastest and easiest working punt I ever had, and drew least water. It was broken and spoiled by careless treatment, but was never injured in gunning. The breadth of punt which can be managed paddling depends on the reach of the gunner and the lowness of the sides.

I quite agree with "Wildfowler" that all shade from anything overhanging outside a punt is bad for getting at birds; therefore, a punt's side should be of one piece, with no bend—mine are made so. Any doubling should be put inside; the more upright the sides, too, the better for concealment. More depends on these things than on height of punt out of water. Many people dislike upright sides, and are so far right that

flaring sides keep out broken water better. With a given width of bottom, flaring sides give greater carrying power; but when the breadth is limited, as it is for paddling, upright sides—that is, bottom as large as the top—give greater floating power than overhanging sides, which, with a limited width at top, can only be had at the expense of narrower bottom and less carrying power.

My gun weighs about 120lb. or 130lb., barrel 9ft. long. I had it a long time, but, thinking it too heavy to work in a punt, always used one about 80lb. until the latter part of February, 1855, when there were more geese to be got than I have known before or since. I then tried the big gun fairly, and found it to kill so much better than any other gun I knew, that I have used it ever since. I built the punt already described to carry it, and adopted the best means I could think of to work it easily. The gun has only just enough stock behind the lock to hold the rope breeching which passes round it, let into the wood. The less stock backwards and downwards the better, as it only limits the height one can shoot flying. The breeching should be of such size and quality that it cannot be broken. My plan is to get the best tarred rope I can (white rope contracts and expands too much when wet and dry, besides being less durable), use it two seasons, and then condemn it. I never broke a breeching. The rope passes through a hole in the fore part of the stem. The sides, bottom, and nosepiece at top were cut square and let in their whole thickness into the stem, and the sides and bottom were doubled for about a foot from the stem. The nose of the punt is so strong that not a nail in it has been loosened, though the gun is loaded with about 8oz. powder and 1½lb. shot, and the recoil is so great that there would be risk of the gun going overboard were it not secured as follows: The gun rests on a willow beam about two inches square in a willow chock, which fits the barrel a little behind where the gun balances. The chock is fixed to the beam by a vertical copper bolt, and turns easily on it as a swivel. The recoil drives the gun through the chock as far as the rope will give; the reaction of the rope then sends the gun forward, and the conical shape of the barrel makes it fit tighter and tighter, till it is gradually stopped a few inches forward of its proper place, without any blow or sudden check. The beam, being connected with the deck, can bear a push forward. The fore end of the stock must not reach within six inches, or better a foot, of the chock, as a blow from the former might demolish the latter. I had to make a new chock last winter, about twenty years' work having worn out the old one. This plan is, I think, safer, and it is handier than shackling the breeching to the gun further forward. The length of rope for spring is greater, and after firing the gun the breeching is just clear of its notch; so the gun is ready to be pulled in without trouble, to keep the muzzle up and the weight further aft while chasing winged birds, or to be run aft to load. A heavy gun can be easily run in and out through a fixed chock, but it is troublesome to put a loose chock in its place with one hand while the weight of the gun is lifted with the other, two or three feet away.

I forgot to say that the ends of the breeching are spliced round eyes, and

a lanyard passed through several times connects the ends alongside the left of the gun's stock ; so the length of the breeching can easily be altered when stretched or shrunk.

A swivel with block or knee fastened to the punt's bottom is bad, on account of the weight, not only of swivel and knee or block, but also of the thick bottom made necessary. The plan already described has all the advantages of a swivel, with greater safety and very much less weight.

My plan of loading is a modification of Col. Hawker's : the copper tube in which the powder is put down is cut off in a slanting direction, and its nose is beaten to a point in the axis of the tube ; a short pipe fixed on this point holds a peg of hard wood, flat or concave at the end, which will go to the bottom of the chamber in the breech, which is small in my gun. The bottom of the tube is about an inch from its back end, and this open end fits on a brass ferule on the ramrod of white deal, tapered to the other end for lightness. The ferule has a channel cut through it from the edge for about half an inch, and then a little way at right angles. A piece of brass soldered across under the channel holds the edge of the ferule together. Inside the back end of the loading tube is a short brass stud ; so the tube is put on like a bayonet, and less than a quarter turn fixes it firmly. The powder is put down the barrel, the rod turned (a flat planed on it, as advised by Col. Hawker, shows which side of the tube is up), the powder is jerked out, and the chamber quickly packed full by a few thrusts of the wooden peg. The wads are of ropeyarn, from rope worn out in my boat, made into hard round balls, a little bigger than the gun's bore. These balls are softened by heat and punched into a cylindrical shape in a hole the size of the bore in a block of wood (a metal tube would be better), and greased with plenty of tallow round their sides. They keep the gun quite clean as far down as they go, and are so firm that they have twice been found in birds shot at close quarters at night. The shot is made up in cartridges on Col. Hawker's plan, smaller than the gun's bore. Varnished *Times* paper answers pretty well for the cartridges, but if kept long in the punt they get damp, and break by the recoil of the gun. Lately I have used waterproof brown paper, after coating the bare side with black varnish ; the paper goes twice round, and is cemented with spirit varnish (hard brown, with a little castor oil to prevent its becoming brittle) : this sticks well when half dry. Cartridges thus made seem very durable ; if pushed home in the gun, so as to expand the oakum at top without striking and bursting the cartridge, it can easily be drawn to change the shot. To do this or to load, I get out of the punt in shoal water if the ground is clean ; on dirty ground or in deep water, if land is close by, I run the punt's head ashore, walk along the deck, and take the gun's muzzle between my knees ; the loading tube does not spill the powder while going down. Off in deep water, the gun is run aft, and is quickly and easily loaded in as much sea as the punt will live in ; if the wind blows the way I want to go, the punt is always let to drift while loading ; if the wind is foul, and the water not too deep, the shoving stick is stuck into the ground, and the punt made



fast to it. To keep water out of the gun's muzzle, a stout leather cylinder is firmly lashed to one end of a second rod, which has a worm for drawing the shot at the other end. This plan is very handy, and in broken water the cap can be kept on the muzzle till near the birds, when it is pushed off with one hand, and the rod left on the deck while the gun is fired.

The gun's muzzle rests, pointing low, on a piece of willow with flat top fixed across on the deck; the muzzle can be raised by pulling aft a stick fixed in a bit of board at right angles to its plane; the board stands under the barrel on the deck. By laying the muzzle well to the left, the elevation can be instantly changed considerably by listing the punt one way or the other. If, as sometimes happens near the birds, the punt's head runs on to a hill and raises the muzzle too high, it can be turned off the head piece and elevator, levelled, and fired, by using both hands. It is sometimes well to be able to level and fire the gun with one hand; for the purpose a small piece of wood is fixed under the stock behind and to the right of the trigger; this wood must be so shaped that the thumb cannot get behind it, as it elevates the gun while the fingers press the trigger. By these means the gun can be laid at any elevation, which can be quickly changed, or can be levelled by hand at will.

I can say little about breech-loading punt guns, never having used one, except that I have not yet seen one that I liked. The reason why muzzle-loading punt guns miss fire so much is plain enough. Below the wad on the powder a coat of fouling forms in the breech, and becomes thicker every shot. This fouling when dry is very hard, but it absorbs moisture from the air so eagerly that, when the gun is left unloaded for half an hour or an hour during a cripple chase, the fouling often becomes like mud, or even liquid blacking when the air is very damp, as it is just at the break of a frost, when the heaviest shots are commonly got. At first I used caps, but, finding the gun to miss fire badly, tried tubes, which proved as bad or worse. A widgeon's quill full of powder on the end of the tube was an improvement, but still there were some missfires. Next, a plug with large hole and small platinum vent at the inner end was tried, the copper tube being fixed in the little end of a tame duck's quill which was filled with fine powder. This plan was worked for five years without a missfire, but the fire was often rather slow, the open end of the quill letting the powder get damp. About 1853 I bethought me of taking a hint from the quill primers then used for heavy ships' guns, and afterwards from the tubes used by the Artillery, making such alterations as suited my purpose. Great difficulty was long found in making the tubes air-tight without checking the fire and making it go chiefly outwards. It would be tedious to describe the various experiments and changes made during the last twenty-five years, but my primers are now practically perfect. They are filled with a chlorate of potash mixture, and each holds a charge, I think, quite as strong as that of a rook rifle; the fire is shut in by the striker, only just enough leakage being allowed to prevent the copper striker,  $\frac{1}{4}$  in. thick, backed by thin iron, being bent into the hole a little more than  $\frac{1}{4}$  in. diameter in the outer part

of the plug. I believe that these tubes would fire the gun through a quarter of an inch of mud, though the hole in the platinum is not bigger than a fair-sized needle; if any of the powder in the breech-chamber is dry enough to burn, the gun must go off, and it is fired so quickly that the primer can never be heard. These primers are quite air and water tight; the case of tinfoil, paper, and varnish is all burnt, and blown away when the gun is fired; so nothing has to be done after loading the gun but to push through the inner touch-hole and powder in the breech-chamber a fine wire projecting from a wooden cylinder, which fits the outer hole and guides the pricker, and to put in a primer. Were a pricker not used, a flake of hard fouling driven by the peg of the loading tube across the touch-hole might cause a slow fire. The primers before being taken out in the punt are greased to keep the touch-hole from fouling; it wants no other cleaning. I tried at first some of the fulminate of mercury percussion powder; it was very expensive, and would not light powder so readily; it would sometimes fail to fire caked and dried meal powder close to it, but not confined with it; while the chlorate mixture struck off, to try it, on the outside of a pinfire gun, would set a newspaper on fire an inch or two away. The well-known corrosive effect of the chlorate is not produced on a punt gun, as there is always powder-gas enough from the vent to blow away anything left. With these primers the gun can be used a whole season without wiping out or cleaning the breech in any way; there is no risk of a miss or slow fire from fouling in the breech.

Without a very tedious and minute description, and a number of drawings, I do not think that anyone could make these tubes well unless after long experience—to say nothing of the chance of burning his hands, if not face and eyes. It is therefore not worth while to attempt a description; but should any gunmaker wish to fit guns for the tubes, and have these made for sale, I would willingly put him in the way of doing so. The primers are troublesome to make; but the saving of trouble in using them, with certainty of fire, would, I think, make many glad to buy them at 1*d.* or 2*d.* each. Quite lately I have thought of a very simple plan for preventing, under all circumstances, misses and slow fires with caps, without the trouble of turning the gun to prime it. I will try this, and if it answers will describe it, for the benefit of those concerned.

The mode of ignition described by "Skolopax" is a very good one—by far the best I have seen published. Beyond the very troublesome business of turning a heavy gun about, the only objection seems to be that, unless the hole for the priming is kept clean—especially if it is left open during a long cripple chase in damp weather—the priming, if left long in it, would get damp and want changing. I can quite understand "Skolopax" having no missfires; I had none with the duck's-quill plan, somewhat like his in principle; but a good deal of care must be required to prevent a slow fire now and then.

A word more about punts. The one described is a very good one, or it would not have been used so long, but it is much heavier than I like. It is easy to work when afloat; but when a pretty good shot has been made up

the mud on the ebb, having, after getting the birds, to drag the punt on soft and perhaps hilly ground, some hundred yards to the quickly retreating water—or having to chase cripples on broken ground full of creeks, just as the hills are coming dry, when one cannot get out and launch far for fear of going into a rill up to one's waist—such things make one value lightness in a punt, and grudge every pound of useless weight. Besides, pulling my punt on deck is rather hard work for two, and, with broken water abeam, she ships more than if lighter, and draws more water. Punts are always made too heavy, often very much so. What anyone can want an inch-thick bottom for, is more than I can understand. I would undertake to use a punt as light as a wager-boat with a little care, only strengthening the nose to take the recoil, and the lower sides for ice. Though I have been punt-shooting on the coast throughout nearly every sharp frost since 1840 or 1841, and have often worked in as much ice as it was possible to get about in, I have never had a punt injured by it, or even scratched, the sides being  $\frac{3}{4}$  in. elm or mahogany. The fishermen gunners' punts have sides  $\frac{3}{4}$  in. thick of elm or fir, and are used till worn out; but on the coast the elm sides have never, to my knowledge, been damaged by ice; the fir sides are sometimes worn ragged, but not cut through. Punts have, however, been cut through in a river which brings down fresh-water ice, which is most to be feared. About paddles, again, such as I have described are much better on ground full of creeks than setting poles and short paddles, as any practical man will understand.

I think this year of building a punt with sides and bottom about a quarter of an inch thick, lower sides a little thicker or coppered, no deck, but perhaps a canvas covering forward, and on the lifeboat principle—all the space below being enclosed compartments, so as to carry one dry as well as safe, with large trap-doors to let out any water shipped down to the watertight covering under the floor. There will be no room to spare to carry out this plan in a single-handed punt for paddling, but I think that it can just be done.

It seems from the letters in the *Field* that many people take interest in punt-shooting. If they would all pull together with decoy owners and shore shooters, could not something be done (as suggested in a former letter, April 13, 1878) to limit the mischief by bird-scaring sailing boats, which drive out of the country in winter our few home-bred ducks, and more and more banish the migrants from our shores by depriving them of the refuge of the open sea?

C. RUSSELL.

Stubbers, Romford.

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

### PUNTING — (*Continued*).

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To resume my views about punting, I think that shooting is, at all times, a most delightful sport; but when it is carried on from a boat, then, indeed, the acme of delight is truly reached, and I will show it. For instance, some men go sailing in yachts for sailing sake, others go in for small boat rowing for rowing sake; *ergo*, both sailing and rowing have charms of their own of sufficient weight to warrant their being resorted to for their own intrinsic worth. Judge then how happy the man must be who is in a craft which he can sail, or row or paddle, or scull or pole, and from which at the same time he can shoot. Why, there is no earthly pleasure to be compared to such a mixture of delight; and the beauty of it is, as "Cigarette" so feelingly pointed out in a most delightful paper on a cruise abroad, that you have to do everything yourself, or do your share of it anyhow. Hence, to my mind, a yacht with a punt is a floating paradise, and I sincerely pity anyone who cannot enjoy such fun.

And before bringing the subject to an end, I must append several more letters on the question. "Cigarette" was first:—

Having made the subject of punt guns and punting one of my especial sports for some years, will you allow me to pass a few remarks on "Wildfowler's" letter of Oct. 12?

Punting is a subject that not one in a thousand knows anything about, and I must pay "Wildfowler" the compliment of agreeing with him in most of his statements.

I do not understand why small cranky punts are built at all, when length makes them steady and safe; you come end on to birds, they do not see

the length of your craft, and the larger your punt the less it shows, as it is lower in the water than a small one with high sides (which all small ones must needs have) can possibly be.

CIGARETTE.

"Deadfall," the eminent sporting writer, was also kind enough to write:—

I have never had any experience of punt shooting, although as a boy I could nearly repeat Col. Hawker's book off by heart; and I possess the work at the present day. My object in writing to you is to express the hope that "Wildfowler" will republish what has appeared (and will still appear) in your columns in the form of a book. It is really a treat to read his communications, as they are so free from arbitrary and *doctrinaire* assertions; and, in replying to correspondents who appear to differ from some of his instructions, the very eligible combination of the gentleman and sportsman is so evident.

I do hope that the series will be long continued, and that the ultimate result will be the book I have hinted at.

DEADFALL.

Perhaps "Deadfall" will still extend his kindness by letting me know now that the book is published what he thinks of it. Meanwhile I thank him, "Cigarette," "St. Kames," and many others who re-echoed his wishes for their cordial wishes and comments.

Mr. E. T. Booth sent also the following letter:—

Some months back two or three letters appeared in the *Field* from gentlemen who complained of having been annoyed while punting on different bays and firths in the north. As it is highly probable that during the present season some persons may fancy themselves in a similar position, I would ask them to pause and consider a moment ere they drag their grievances before the public, and enter on a course that can only result in giving satisfaction to those who have robbed them of their sport; for they will most certainly chuckle over the success of their schemes and the discomfiture of the unfortunate fowlers.

If one only takes the other side of the question, it is, I think, at least rather aggravating where a gentleman preserves a number of fowl which breed on his ground, and, as the season advances, betake themselves to the adjacent bays and rivers, remaining, if unmolested, an object of interest during the whole winter, that a stranger should intrude and make short work of these almost half-domesticated birds. At one of the spots mentioned I have myself found the mallard so tame that they only swam a few yards to make way for the punt. I was informed by the keepers—remarkably civil men—that they had orders, if possible, to protect the fowl from the attacks of strange gunners. I say "remarkably civil," as I have generally noticed my own men to look with anything but respect on shooters who encroached on what they considered my own particular beat or station.

May I again counsel moderation to puntsmen if ever they are quietly informed that the keepers have orders to look after any part of the coast? To storm and rave at men who are simply doing their duty can hardly be expected to bring good results. On several occasions I have known gentlemen, by abusing gamekeepers, or even some unoffending shore popper who had by accident disturbed the fowl, transform a passive spectator into an active enemy. One instance will suffice.

A few years back, while partridge shooting over a friend's ground in the north, we happened to approach the shore. Here a punt gunner was "layed" at a lump of scaup, which were diving and feeding in fancied security within one hundred yards of where we were standing. The dogs were called to heel, and we remained quiet to see the effect of the shot, as I was rather anxious to watch the performance of the sportsman, for I had that morning been informed that a rival gunner had made his appearance on the firth. Just as he was getting within range an unlucky woodcock flapped out of a small covert close by. This was a chance I could not resist, and the consequence was, of course, disastrous to the anticipated shot, the fowl immediately taking flight before the gunner had time to fire. As the cock fell on the open sands and was retrieved in his sight, he certainly had but small excuse for expressing his sentiments as to our behaviour so forcibly as he did. It is an old saying that listeners never hear any good of themselves, so we speedily moved on and continued our sport, which gradually led us away from the shore. Towards evening we again approached the coast, as I had ordered the dogcart to meet me at a spring close to the high road. When we arrived at the appointed spot the conveyance had not yet come up, so I followed the course of a burn down towards the firth, where there were generally a couple or two of snipe to be found. One full bird and a jack was all the ground afforded, and, having bagged both birds, I regained the road just as the trap drew up. The keeper's lodge being on the far side of the ground, I left him to make his way back across the hill, and drove off towards home along the shore of the firth, keeping a good look-out for, but seeing no signs of, our irascible friend of the morning.

I had hardly finished my dinner, after reaching home, when I received a message that Duncan, the keeper, wished "to speak with me." I then learned that, if I had only turned my head after I drove off, I should have observed the puntsmen making his way towards where the shots had been fired at the snipe. It seems that he had again had a good chance spoiled, and this time he had landed with the intention of taking summary vengeance, or at least of speaking his mind pretty clearly, with regard to his fancied grievance. From our previous acquaintance I was perfectly aware that, unless, as some sage remarks, "Language is given us to conceal our thoughts," his opinion concerning us was the reverse of flattering, so I was in no way surprised at Duncan's very animated description of their meeting. The object of the keeper's visit had been to beg for the use of one of my boats or punts, so as to prevent the obnoxious gunner from shooting on the firth. He claimed for his employer, from some old charter,

the sole right of shooting and mussel gathering on that part of the shore, and wished to enforce the law. I was glad I had previously ordered some painting and alterations to all my boats, as I had no wish to be mixed up in any dispute. I was, however, by no means sorry to hear, on my return a couple of days later from a shooting expedition in a distant part of the county, that the foul-mouthed stranger had been driven from the water without obtaining a shot.

Servants, keepers, or puntamen, occasionally drive the fowl away without any orders from their masters. The last time I was in the north I heard of one bay that it was useless to enter, as the fowl were invariably shot up. I went, however, one day to have a look at the spot. Sure enough, a man came down to the shore, and, after entering into conversation with him, I found he was the professional gunner employed by the gentleman who hired the adjacent shootings. His governor, he said, hardly ever fired a shot at the fowl, but he tried to keep the bay as quiet as possible, partly for his master's benefit, and partly as he had been sworn at by some person who came in a yacht, for getting first to some birds that both had been setting to. After this, he acknowledged that he, if possible, prevented strangers from shooting just in front of the lodge; and I must say I considered him perfectly right in so doing. He was civil enough to me; and, as I seldom paid his quarters a visit, he never in any manner attempted to spoil my sport. On the east coast I heard of one gentleman who behaved in such an overbearing manner that all, or nearly all, the gunners combined together, and so persistently shot up his birds that he had to give up shooting in that district.

I have myself experienced most of the vicissitudes that happen to puntmen, and have had quite my share of sport, without airing my troubles in print; indeed, I think I could claim to have been worse used than most gunners, as, in addition to having had fowl driven off in front of my punt by bullets being fired into the flocks, on one occasion, while shooting on the south coast, some enterprising individual took a cool pot shot at me with a rifle, by no means a bad shot either, as the bullet flecked up the water about twenty yards before it reached the boat, and passing, struck again about thirty yards beyond. On looking from one spot to the other, I could never understand how it missed me. This time I must say I felt of the same opinion as the Quaker when he was shot while standing at his own front door, viz., that "the man ought to be spoke to."

I was only about one hundred and twenty yards off, and, as soon as he missed me, I picked up a heavy double that had 1½ oz. No. 1, green cartridges, and fired both barrels at him. The old gun has a nasty trick of balling, and my man remarked, we should probably find some part of him on shore. He was just vanishing in the fog—it was a thick day—as I fired, and, when we landed, we could see no signs of him. On our way back we happened to come alongside a shrimp boat that had been trawling in the same bay, and my man replied, in answer to their inquiry, "What sport?"—that we had had a narrow escape of being bagged ourselves. "What!" exclaimed the fisherman, "you been shot at? Look at our

mils—two shots through the fore-sail, two between the masts, and another under the counter. My mate says: 'Up trawl, Joe, and let's hook it.' 'No,' says I, 'May as well be shot as starved. Let the beggar shoot.' This must evidently have been the work of the same "cuss." I should think, as a Yankee would express it, that he must have had "snakes in his boots" that day. This shows what vicissitudes may sometimes happen to sportsmen. We go out to shoot, and become a target ourselves.

There is one more reason why I would beg puntamen to refrain from publishing the quarters where they are annoyed. A few quiet bays along a range of coast are a great inducement to fowl to visit the whole locality; and if strangers happen to hear of these favoured spots, some one or other is safe to get in and drive away the birds, and when at last the place becomes well known, the harbour for fowl will be destroyed, and no good done to anyone.

"Wildfowler" himself remarks that, owing to the number of shooters visiting some spots he had mentioned, the whole of the sport was ruined.

I am sorry to see that another punt gunner ("Cigarette") is of the same opinion as myself with regard to breechloading guns, viz., that they are not to be compared to muzzle-loaders. I tried two or three some years ago, and found them most unsatisfactory in every respect; but I was in hopes that before this time there might be an improvement. Muzzle-loaders, though of course a great hindrance, are all very well in fine weather; but the nuisance of having to load them in drifting rain and snow, when one frequently meets with the best chances, must have been experienced to be fully appreciated. On a short winter's day I once fired twenty-two shots from an old muzzle-loading barrel in a muddy harbour in the north, snow falling heavily, and occasionally furious squalls following one another in rapid succession. That we managed to get the gun off so many times without a single missfire speaks well for the old system, as the mess we were in may be imagined when I state that the snow and dirt, combined with the salt water we had shipped, had rendered three out of the four barrels of my two pin-fire shoulder guns useless, owing to the cases—which we had no time to cut out—breaking and becoming fixed in the barrels. I hope that "Wildfowler" will give us the result of his experience as to the killing powers of breechloaders compared with muzzle-loaders. One or two gunmakers have consented to let me have breechloading guns on trial. I never buy a gun, large or small, without this concession. These I intend to test against a favourite old 9ft. barrel; and should my own gun be beaten in pattern and penetration I shall be satisfied that breechloaders are good enough for all practical purposes.

E. T. BOOTH.

Brighton.

To this Mr. Everitt replied:—

It pleases me to see the interest which has suddenly sprung up in punt gunning, the most scientific sport going; as not only must one have had several years' experience before one can hope to do much, but also have all his senses in full vigour, be a good boatman, naturalist, weather-judge and



shot, with unbounded patience and judgment, also perseverance. So keen are the senses of birds, that each species must be worked in a different manner. I regret that at present I know of no system of breechloading punt guns acceptable to an old gunner, to whom an efficient one would be a great boon, and should not be an impossibility; and I trust that this discussion will assist to the desired end.

I can quite indorse Mr. Booth's remarks regarding the simplicity of flying shots from a properly appointed punt and gun. The old rest and roping system I consider so obsolete as not to be worth comment. A good gunner would trust his own eye and hand rather than "undulating mud" or water. It would be most interesting if Mr. Booth would favour us with a detailed account of the day on which he fired twenty-two shots, as I have always found seven to ten shots a very heavy day indeed, even in the finest weather and easiest circumstances, with locomotion, picking up cripples, without too much snapping, and keeping boat and gear in fair order, as a punt shooter is always deliberate in his actions. I have been surrounded all day by myriads of birds, but never remember to have found my punt in such confusion as Mr. Booth mentions. Good punters invariably bring their birds ashore in fair (even good) order, having bagged as many as possible with the smallest amount of noise and firing, well knowing that no ground will stand undue harassing in a rough-and-tumble fashion, without tremendous deterioration; hence one duffer will do more harm than half a dozen gunners, and kill about a tithe of a single one. I remember seeing several pistol stocks eighteen years ago. I cannot close this letter without a tribute of thanks to you, Mr. Editor, also your various correspondents, for bringing out this useful and interesting discussion.

W. S. EVERITT.

Carlton Colville, Lowestoft, Nov. 14.

And Mr. Booth rejoined:—

In reply to Mr. Everitt, I think, as so little interest is taken in punting affairs by the majority of sportsmen (I am very glad of it myself, as there are now far too many big gunners), that for me to give a long account of a day's punt shooting would be taking up too much of your valuable space. If Mr. Everitt cares to write to me privately, I will give him a few particulars concerning the day he refers to; but not the locality, as the water I was shooting on was preserved by the owners, and some unprincipled gunners having occasionally gone there without permission, it has led to unpleasantness.

Then came the following:—

I for one quite differ from Mr. Booth in the view I take of the subject, and think it would be most interesting to your readers if sportsmen would give their experiences of the places they visit, and how they are treated by the inhabitants. I think the gunner who had his shot spoiled at scaups might be excused for a little rough language—it was "enough to make a parson swear;" but these gamekeepers appear to have their favourites, and Mr. B. is a privileged man, and therefore, of course, he does not want us there—quite disinterested advice! It does appear to me

a most impudent piece of presumption for anyone to endeavour to monopolise a portion of the sea for his individual use. I remember Mr. Mottram's letter in the *Field*, in which he complained, and I think very justly too, of the ungentlemanly treatment he received at Little Ferry and other places in the North of Scotland, by persons who had no more right to the exclusive shooting there than they have of the air we breathe. One of your correspondents at that time said he intended going to Little Ferry (no doubt an excellent place) to try "conclusions" with these cantankerous north countrymen; if he has done so perhaps he will inform us how he succeeded. If a man has nothing else to do, I fancy it would take a good deal of persecution to drive him off a good ground, and those keepers and shore loafers must be careful they do not break the law in endeavouring to do so. One man sets up a sort of claim, as the birds were bred on his grounds. Pray what kind of wildfowl may they happen to be? It can only be the common wild duck, nothing else, and that in very limited quantities, as all other wildfowl are migratory; and if they are so very tame, why not catch them, and then the ground will be clear for other gunners? I do not profess to know much about the subject; but, thanks to "Wildfowler" and all his interesting information, I hope in time to be a sportsman—now I am only a NOVICE.

P.S.—Will Mr. Booth be kind enough to inform in the *Field* the name of the place on the east coast where some gentleman was driven away by the professionals? I have an old friend in that part of the world, and I have been much amused by his gunning yarns. He knows most of the amateurs and professionals; and, if it is the same place I mean, I heard quite a different version of that story. If that is the case, Mr. Booth has got hold of "the wrong end of the stick."

Another correspondent wrote:—

On reading Mr. Booth's letter in your issue of the 11th inst., I am inclined to think that gentleman should not support the tactics of those obnoxious individuals who endeavour to spoil the sport of gunners on salt water. In nearly every case I think the interference is most unjustifiable and entirely illegal, and arises from jealousy and selfishness.

No one has a right to arrogate to himself the sole use of a bay or line of shore, &c., and those who appear to do so are either the landholders and their servants, the gentleman puntsman "who has his own particular beat or station," or the professional gunner; but neither of them nor anyone else has the slightest legal ground for annoying or molesting a strange gunner, should he appear on the scene, unless he is shooting near an ancient decoy, which, if he disturbs, renders him liable to an action. I don't seek for one moment to excuse a man who, in his anxiety to get a shot, spoils what he sees to be a far better chance for another; but I protest against systematic annoyance being encouraged.

I believe it is the fact that the right of sporting over the sea and on tidal rivers, or wherever the tide ebbs and flows, is free to all in the land; therefore, if I, in the exercise of my right, am systematically annoyed, or have

my sport purposely spoilt, should I not be entitled to maintain an action against those who are the cause of it? I think I should; and no doubt I could obtain an injunction from the Chancery Division of the High Court of Justice against any person who so annoyed or molested me, to restrain them from a continuance of such conduct.

I know very well some landholders have a right to the foreshore between the high and low water mark. Whether it is an absolute right or not is an open question; but a far greater number claim a right which does not exist at all. *Primâ facie* the foreshore belongs to the Crown; but in any event, when it is covered by the water no ancient charters entitling a private person to the use of the soil will prevent the public having the free use of the waters then; but your most able correspondent "Wildfowler" knows what debateable ground the rights of the public to the foreshore is, and the annoyance caused to shore shooters in some places. I hope he has not forgotten the old question, or, at any rate, will remember it when opportunity arises. It is bad enough to be annoyed on the land; but we should be allowed to enjoy the sport on the water without interference.

E. G. E.

"Novice's" and E. G. E.'s views are sound on the subject of wildfowl resorts, and I thank them for their complimentary remarks anent my unworthy self.

Referring to Mr. Booth's letter in which he says, "'Wildfowler' himself remarks that, owing to the number of shooters visiting some spots he had mentioned, the whole of the sport was ruined," I beg to say that Mr. Booth is quite right; but I should like to add a few words in explanation of my *modus operandi* and its results, as it is sure to prove of interest to those sportsmen who are devoted to shore and wildfowl shooting.

Now, my object, when I first began visiting systematically the principal resorts of wildfowl on the south and the east coasts, was to provide reliable information as to what sport and what accommodation could be reasonably expected by visitors at the sundry spots. Had I confined my visits to only three or four places, my information would have been the ruin of these spots for many years to come, precisely for the reason mentioned by Mr. Booth; but, as I intended visiting many available spots, of course I naturally enough thought that shooters would divide their attention between them all, and thus there would be but few shooters, and these far between, at each spot. Instead of which a perfect army of wildfowl shooters took up

arms, and as a matter of absolute fact one hundred and fifty shooters turned up at a certain spot on the Monday following the Saturday issue of the paper wherein my narrative concerning the spot had appeared. Now wildfowl shooting and shore shooting were, previous to my taking them up as subjects, almost entirely confined to those men who happened to live near the sea, and its bays and estuaries. But, with a most gratifying unanimity, such a number of shooters took up the idea, and followed in my footsteps, that, virtually, from that date quite a new era opened for the gunmaking trade, and wildfowl guns became quite an important branch of the business. Now in all this, of course, I, as a sporting writer, did but my duty by standing for the public. Any information of value I gave unreservedly, and, may I add, most unselfishly, though perhaps not without a pang; for, after all, I have my feelings, and to throw open to all some places where hitherto one had had the fun all to himself requires a certain amount of self-abnegation. But I never was selfish. I never even go on my own shootings but I ask some friend to join me; and, in fact, respecting wildfowling, I took a certain pride in letting others know what glorious sport they could have if they only went for it. But, of course, my trips were limited. They should not be, however, taking all circumstances into consideration; and were *all* the available good spots in the British kingdom to be inspected, shot over, and reported upon, there would be so many places thus made known to all, that, virtually, gunners would not interfere with each other's sport. As matters now stand, hundreds of strangers visit the stations I have referred to every season, and no doubt such numbers act detrimentally to each individual meeting with success, but for this I am not to blame; and the plan I suggest is the only one that would obviate such inconveniences—viz., a visit of mine to each wildfowl station worthy of interest, and a report of the sport actually experienced there. What a grand work of reference a collection of such information would be! My three works supply a good deal of such notes, but there are other numberless admirable bays and estuaries in the North, and in Ireland, and along the West coast in some favoured

localities, which have never been dealt with publicly. But, as Mr. Booth states, there are cases where a wise discretion should be exercised, and really there would be no need to disturb private, or almost private, waters—although, virtually, all such waters ought really to be in the enjoyment of the public. But taking matters as they stand, there are scores of superb places where strangers could go and enjoy themselves without disturbing anyone's peace of mind. Of course, the carrying-out of such a programme of inspection rests with the public. Let wildfowl shooters only state their wish that it should be done, and the *vox populi* will carry the matter.

I now come again to the correspondence.

"Cigarette" propounded the following query:—

Will any of your correspondents give me a good idea on the following subject? I want a skeleton punt or sledge for pushing over mud (to carry a 100lb. gun), to reach birds sitting thereon by day. Of course, a small light punt can be crowded up to them, but this does not suit me, as where I have been punting this winter the water is rough and open, and a small punt is scarcely safe. I saw a native in the north of England do great execution with merely a plank turned up at both ends, and his gun fixed thereon, where with a receding tide, punters could not compete in either pace to get to the birds, or in disguising themselves sufficiently when on the alob. There is something of the kind described in one of Col. Hawker's earlier editions, but it looks more like a wheel-barrow than anything else, and would loom too large. I fancy a framework on light but very broad runners, like a sledge, would answer the purpose.

I should think that the sledge, illustrated at page 106, could give a good hint as to what sort of thing would answer—but if any water had to be met, then, I should certainly advocate the use of the mud punts, which are described and illustrated in the earlier editions of Col. Hawker's book.

On the subject of the shooting powers of punt guns, "Punter" wrote:—

The shooting of punt guns depends on the boring of the barrel; if the gun is accurately straight, the shot begins to fall away from the "line of fire" immediately it leaves the muzzle, being subject to the laws of gravitation. If you are convinced your gun is accurate, I should advise the gun to be aimed just above the heads of wildfowl on the water, to kill the largest number. You will generally find the birds just off the water when the shot reaches them, as they rise instantly with the flash, especially teal or

widgeon. To give a case in point, some time ago I was out punting, and could find but few birds about, until I observed four teal on the point of a narrow piece of land, when I decided to try to get the four with my punt gun. So, "setting" along until within range, I aimed just over their heads and pulled the trigger, when, to my great surprise, I saw a little cloud rise up, and part of it instantly fall. Upon reaching the spot, I found no less than twenty-two teal which I had bagged by that shot. They appear to have been just at the water's edge behind the point of land (the reason I did not see them), and, springing with the flash, met the full charge. I think it may be safely taken that it is better to err on the side of elevation than depression.

and "Skolopax" also gave some useful hints :—

My letter was written for the benefit of the young gunner, who has always many difficulties to contend with, and to "teach his young idea how to shoot" with an unerring aim. Some particulars were omitted, however, which should now be brought to his notice; and first with respect to the gun. The usual mode of checking the recoil is by a loop underneath the barrel, which I consider objectionable, as it has a tendency to throw up the muzzle and make the gun shoot high. My present gun was "mounted" in this way, and was found to be very unsatisfactory for its first few seasons; it used to kill splendidly at long shots, but near ones were frequently missed. Had I reduced the charge, the gun might have done its work equally well at long and short distances; but it never occurred to me to do so. I removed the loop and put on a pair of trunnions, and, whether the distance be now long or short, the gun shoots equally true. With respect to cleaning, it may be observed that washing with water is quite unnecessary. Every shooter should know the shape of the breech of his gun, and have fixtures on the end of a cleaning rod that will reach every part of it; if sponged or swabbed out with dry oakum, and afterwards finished with a linen shot bag, the gun may be thoroughly cleaned. To facilitate the operation the powder should be well stoved, so as to extract every particle of damp. Damp powder leaves behind it in the barrel damp inky moisture; but if it is stoved, when the rod and oakum is withdrawn it will be found impregnated with a hard scaly powder, free from all damp, and when finished with the linen shot bag it will come out clean, leaving the barrel perfectly clean and dry. I never, except on one trial, found powder free from damp. Formerly, when it was supplied to us in wooden kegs of 25lb., the damp was very considerable; now the 5lb. tin canisters are a great improvement. To ascertain whether your powder is dry, take a small quantity, say  $\frac{1}{2}$ lb., put it into a bowl immersed in hot water, then place an inverted glass tumbler on the powder, and if it is damp you will see it like steam on the glass. To stove a large quantity, take a moderate-sized black crock, put it for an hour into the oven; when taken out, immerse it in another crock or pan with hot water, where it will stand for a long time hot enough to stove 5lb. of powder. No man who is in the habit of smoking should attempt this operation, lest he should forget

himself and proceed to manipulate and stir the powder with a cigar in his mouth ; indeed, it is safer to stove only small quantities at a time, and thus guard against accidents.

It is almost unnecessary to mention that the yoke head on the canoe rudder should be made to fit very easy with a pin through it attached by a piece of brass chain, so that it may be unshipped in a moment, and all stowed away, when a shot is fired, under the after deck ; the canoe is then pulled stern foremost after the cripples, or may be pushed, as circumstances may require. The wash boards on the after-deck should always be put up when pulling stern foremost.

Of course, several of these hints have already been referred to, but I like to allow a perfectly free discussion on all subjects, and therefore prefer publishing the letters as they stand.

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## CHAPTER XXIV.

### MY FIRST SINGLE-HANDED PUNTING TRIP.

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As it may interest some of my readers to know how I got on when I first began punting, I append the following, which (with five or six more articles on wildfowl shooting) I originally contributed to the *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*: Even to this very day I cannot help laughing at the remembrance of my first single-handed expedition in a punt. I was determined to go, at all risks, arguing that it would be simply delightful to be all alone by myself in a punt, with a punt-gun, vowing mentally untold destruction to all the fowl on the estuary. I saw already (in my imagination) heaps of dead ducks and widgeon filling up the sternsheets of my punt. I pictured to my mind the astonishment and unmitigated disgust of the professionals on beholding my triumphant return laden with spoils, and, when soberly thinking the matter over, I did not see at all why all this should not come to pass. I knew all about it, of course—had I not seen Sam do it? Well, then, what was to prevent me from emulating his deeds? Nothing. Then I would do it, or try, anyhow; and I did, and with the result that, to this hour, when the subject is brought on the *tapis* I cannot help smiling. But let me proceed.

First of all, and to begin with, old Sam would not let me have his punt-gun. He did not mind lending me his small punt, he said, as he was going with his brother in their double-handed one, but to lend me his old swivel gun he



could not make up his mind, and after trying to persuade him by all sorts of arguments, venal and otherwise, I got so sick of asking him that, finally, I voted him a double-dyed old fool, and told him so, and went my way, fuming, to see if I could beg, buy, hire, borrow, or steal a punt gun elsewhere.

Now there was in the village a puntsman who had been for some time laid up with a fever, caught somewhere in one of the marshes when waiting for fowl, and to this man's abode I wended my way. I found him sitting by a roaring fire, made up of timber from some wreck, and he was, moreover, wrapped up in a couple of blankets, but, notwithstanding, the poor fellow was actually shivering and clacking his teeth with all his might.

"You don't look very bright, Simon," said I, commiseratingly.

"I does not feel very bright, sir," replied he, "but still I am a-gettin' on, I am."

"Oh! are you? I am glad to hear it, I am sure;" but I thought, inwardly, that, judging from appearances, I should not have guessed it, or else Simon must have been "passing" bad previously, if his actual state was an improvement. Howbeit, I at once broached the subject of my visit.

"I want a punt and a punt gun," said I. "Old Sam is willing to lend me his punt and all her etceteras, but as for his 'blooming' gun, he will *not* let me have her!"

Simon, in spite of his misery, could not help smiling at this.

"The old idiot," said he, "never would lend her to anybody! She has never left his hands since I've knowed him. However," he added, "you can have mine, sir, and welcome; but you'd better take my punt as well, so as to have all the fixins ready and all right."

This was very sensible advice on his part; but when I came to look at the "fixins" I found that the paddle-string was missing, the punt's rudder was gone, and her bottom was

under two or three inches of water, besides which her little mast was split right in two, and therefore useless. Nevertheless, I was not to be done out of my trip, and in the afternoon, after repairs, solemnly, my chums came to see me off. The gun was loaded properly, Simon had said, when she carried ten ounces of shot. Well, that, we had weighed to a grain, and therefore I had every promise, at last, of being fitly rigged out.

Away I went, with three cheers from my companions.

"When will you be back?" they had asked me.

"Oh, early in the morning, I expect," I had replied, and they promised they would come down to the "hard" in time to greet me on my return, and "help me to carry my birds!!!" Ah! ha!

I started, of course with my oars, at the rate of thirty-five odd strokes to the minute, whilst two old puntsmen grinned on from the shore. Evidently they thought that *that* could not last, and neither did it. Before I had covered half a mile I relaxed to twenty, and finally settled down to very gentle work indeed, already feeling uncommonly warm, although the weather was most bitterly cold.

At the Point I caught a crab, and got in consequence thereof a very hard knock on my precious "knob" from the hard stock of the gun. Fortunately no one was by, and so I indulged in some protracted rubbing of the tender spot, and then set on again. The tide was ebbing very fast, and when I got in mid-channel I went along in rare style, soon getting three or four miles down. Then I began to look about me. It was getting dark, the tide was low, the flats were stretching around me as far as the eye could reach, and beyond the cries of some shanks, oxbirds, curlews, and herons, which were feeding about, no other sound was audible, and I thought it at first a not unpleasant feeling to find myself thus all alone in the midst of this utter loneliness. There was, then, no occasion to hurry, and I allowed the punt to float about in mid-stream, keeping my eyes about me on the watch for everything that would come my way. Had I been intent upon bagging shore birds, I verily believe I could have loaded

the punt with all the known species, or thereabouts; for, as I drifted slowly along the flats, I literally passed hundreds, nay, thousands of birds of all kinds which did not seem in the least to notice me. In fact I was several dozens of times very severely tempted to bag a few of them, and more than once I collared my shoulder-gun with the intention of settling some particularly tempting lot; but I always remembered in time that I had come for punting—*bonâ fide* punting—nothing more nor less than punting; and therefore I ought to abstain from any other indulgence for fear of spoiling the chances of the big gun.

Ah! That *was* sensibly argued, if you like, and no mistake, as the sequel will show. Howbeit, as I was getting down the estuary, I thought it time to practise a little paddling, so as to be ready when paddling would be needed in earnest. So I laid myself down and tried, and found that it was not very difficult work; the only troublesome points in connection therewith being, firstly, the acquirement of the knack of recovering without making a noise of splashing (but this, after a few strokes, I found was not an impossible accomplishment); and, secondly, the extraordinary inconvenient position of one's head, which is terribly in the way somehow. If you try to hold it up the muscles at the back of your neck are soon very tired; you cannot lie on your face—your proboscis being in the way prevents that system from being comfortable; so you must turn your head, first on its starboard, and then on its port sides; and, on the whole, I do not think paddling would be chosen as a pastime *pur et simple* by anyone in search of a pleasurable sort of outdoor sport, were it not that the gun is brought into play with it. That is just it. It is the gun that induces men to put up with such hard work and discomfort.

Well, in the midst of my experiments, a rare lot of fowl passed overhead, and I became all attention; but it was then pitch dark, and I knew that, although the moon would eventually rise and make things brighter, I had a good hour and a half yet to wait for her appearance, and I do not think that in the whole course of my life I have ever found an hour and a

half going so slowly by. It was simply awful. There I was in that blessed punt, waiting, and waiting, and waiting; and when I had been, to my mind, at least two hours at it, I found, on looking at my watch, that only a quarter of an hour had elapsed!

I began to feel rather dull—and well I might. I drank a glass of sherry—I was getting cold, now that I was remaining motionless; then I heard a shot, and that brightened me up a bit; then some birds passed over me at terrific speed, evidently disturbed; and, finally, hearing some fowl settling noisily somewhere close by, I ventured out of the creek to reconnoitre. They were then quite silent, and I remained still too, knowing full well that they were listening, very probably, in order to make sure that they were not to be molested; and, for some five minutes, I was thus kept in suspense. At last, I saw some dark objects coming down slowly with the tide, and I forthwith cocked the gun, and began professionally to “set” to them; but, as I drew nearer, I found, just in time, that I was paddling to half a dozen rotten old hampers, thrown overboard from some barge, no doubt!

What a blessing I was alone, thought I. Had anyone been with me, I should have become the laughing-stock of the wild-fowling community, when it would have become known that I had deliberately “worked” up in the dark to some hampers and seaweeds, taking them for birds!

After this little disappointment, I began to doubt my capabilities. After all, punting *might* require special knowledge, notwithstanding my previous doubts to the contrary. On the other hand, how foolish of me not to have noticed how quietly and silently the hampers and other rubbish were drifting to me, whereas birds always make some sort of noise, and indulge in some evolutions—Experience No. 1.

In the midst of my thoughts, and not very complimentary reflections on my want of sagacity (but the fact is, one gets so excited that one's eyes see things that do not exist; I firmly believed originally that I could see the birds moving, &c., &c.), the moon arose.

“Anyhow,” I reasoned, “I have heard the birds settling

somewhere about here, and they have not gone ; of that I am certain. Now, I must make them out ; who knows, I may have a rare sweep into them, and, after all, go back ashore loaded with birds ! ”

Thus hope again brightened me up, and I paddled, and paddled, and paddled, until I was positively reeking with perspiration, and really my exertions deserved a better reward—but no man can command success, he can but deserve it—this I did, I am sure, to the best of my ability, as I never worked so hard, so willingly, and so perseveringly, either before or since. Still, no birds could I find, and when I now and then listened for their sounds none could I hear.

I was broken-hearted with fatigue, hope deferred, and vexation, but this overcoming feeling did not last long. “Never say die ! ” quoth I, inwardly, “rest and try again.” I accordingly rested, mopped my wet brow and neck, drank another glass of sherry, and waited for events.

This waiting business I found was the staple commodity in punting. He who can patiently wait is the successful man in that pursuit. Unfortunately, I was not endowed with any greatly perceptible amount of patience, and hence, I verily believe, by rowing and paddling about I spoiled two or three good chances, of which an experienced man would have availed himself, for two or three times I disturbed birds, of whose proximity I was not aware, by recklessly going on instead of listening for their “charming” before proceeding to try and make them out.

At last I saw about three or four score of birds, flying very low, pass some hundred yards or so from me, and I knew by the way they threw up their necks that they were going to settle, *ergo*, they had not seen me, and at last I should have a chance ! My heart began to beat very wildly. I seized the paddles and proceeded in the orthodox fashion to work up. I could hear them plainly, and soon I saw them. They were over a shallow, and I, being in the shade of the flats, had everything in my favour. I went on paddling as strongly and as slowly as I possibly could, but somehow, as fate

would have it, I got stuck on the flat. I did not like to get off, fearing to disturb the birds, so I resolved to chance a long shot—they were at least a hundred and twenty yards off; so I gently turned the gun on to them, and pulled. Away they went, but, in my enthusiasm, I made sure I must have killed some of them, and I almost patted myself on the back, on the spur of the moment, at my successful beginning. However, with a terrible lot of trouble, I got the punt off, and when in deep water I rowed to the spot with all speed; but, to my great sorrow, no cripples or dead birds could I see; and though I had carefully looked all about the place, I had come to the conclusion that my shot had been a clean miss, when, to my utmost delight, I saw a bird on the mud. To land, to jump ashore with the cripple gun, and to sink up to my stomach in the ooze was the work of an instant. The more I tried to extricate myself the deeper I sank. Meanwhile the bird was going, but I, with the sporting instinct strong in me, even unto death, had the natural impulse and good sense of giving it both barrels. That done, I found myself in the mud up to my armpits, pretty well; and the position became, accordingly, critical in the extreme. Meanwhile the punt, left to herself, was slowly working herself loose under the power of the now rising tide, and then visions came into my mind of a paragraph in the paper wherein my sad fate would have been described in suitable colours.

“Food for crabs, by Jove!” thought I. “And this is to be the end of my punting trip! No luck! hard lines! Here is the darned punt almost free now, and I shall be left here to drown like a rat. Can’t anything be done? Ahoy! ahoy! ahoy!”

“Halloa, there! ahoy!” sounded back in the distance—a very rough voice, but, to my ears, harps divine could not have had sweeter tone, for was I not to be rescued from a dreadful death!

“Here! this way, whoever you are, lend a hand!” I shouted with all my might. And soon the sound of paddles began, and drew nearer.

"Where are you?" queried the voice again.

"Sam! It *is* Sam! Ain't you Sam?" yelled I.

"Yes; I be Sam! But who be you?" said the old fowler, as he drew near.

And behold him and his brother Jack rowing their punt up to mine.

Of the rest I know but little, and that little by hearsay. Old Sam put on his mud pattens and had a "job," as he expressed it, to pull me out of the grave I had made for myself. By that time my mouth was below the level of the "soft," and I had fainted, being smothered in fact, as plain as smothered could be. Of course I was wet through and very cold, but the horny hands of wildfowl shooters are rare restoratives to circulation of the blood, for I soon recovered, and found Sam vigorously rubbing me; my mouth was full of sherry, mud, and salt water, and Jack astern was securing my vagabond punt.

"She is all right, anyhow," he soliloquised, "and now we had better be off since the young gentleman has recovered."

"Well," I said, thankfully, "it *was* lucky you came this way!"

"We knew you was out, and came after you, and when we heard you fire," said Sam, "we thought we would give you a look up, in case you had had too many birds to take home single-handed!" And he grinned somewhat sarcastically.

"Ah, well, never mind," I said, rather penitently, "I called you an old fool this morning, Sam. I am now very sorry for it, and I should like to shake hands with you. You have to-night saved my life, and, as they say in melodramas, I shall never forget it."

So we shook hands and then prepared for a start.

"But where is my bird?" remarked I. "I have had enough bother to get it, and I shall have it, anyhow."

"Where is it?"

"Why, there," and I pointed out its luckless carcase.

Sam got it and I had it stuffed, and whenever I looked at it the remembrance of my first punting expedition came very vividly before my mind's eye, and I thought that it was not

"all roses" in that punting pursuit which brings so many wildfowl to our markets; but, at the same time, to my mind, there is no more fascinating sport, and I need not add that my first trip, far from deterring me from continuing to enjoy the fun, seemed to act upon me as a very strong incentive. If everything always went right things would be too good for us in this world. A mishap now and then makes us relish eventual success all the more: at least, that is my opinion.

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## CHAPTER XXV.

### AMATEUR AND PROFESSIONAL PUNTSMEN.

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WHEN an amateur wishes to enjoy a little punting he generally engages a professional puntsman to take him out in a double-handed punt, and whilst the man performs all the labour the amateur has all the fun ; and if he adopts the precaution of taking with him everything he requires, he will have as jolly a time of it as he may wish, since, with his rugs and thick clothing, good food, good drinks, and general comforts, he need endure no hardships, and may only face the weather when a shot is nigh. But this is not the case, by any means, with the professional puntsman. Some few professional wildfowl shooters are pretty well-to-do—in their way—but the vast majority are very poor, and therefore theirs is a harder lot than it would be were they able to provide those creature comforts which their few richer professional *confrères*, and amateurs, are able to secure.

Take the average wildfowlers, for instance, and it will be found that they will be out in the hardest of weather, with but scanty clothing and little food or drink, and yet never a grumble is to be heard from them—if they succeed in getting fowl.

Why ? Why, simply because these men are sportsmen at heart, and they begrudge neither exposure, exertion, nor privations if they only kill birds. I do not mean that the value of the birds is despised by them ; this is not likely to be the case with men who make their living by killing them, but the feeling paramount in their minds is the sport they have

enjoyed. Indeed, in some seasons but a bare living can be made by wildfowl shooting, yet this does not prevent the men from pursuing their calling, and many of them stick to it all their lives—they live and die puntsmen—because the attraction of the sport is so all-powerful that they could not think of giving it up. Nay, I who am writing this have known many cases when men, who during the summer seasons had been provided with some permanent employment, actually threw it up when the winter set in, and when asked why and wherefore, the invariable reply was that “the birds were again about the estuary, and the punt gun must again have a ‘go’ at them.” If this is not a passion for sport I should like to know what is. Here were these men actually giving up a tangible, profitable, and permanent employment, merely for the sake of pursuing their old, precarious, uncertain, and but poorly remunerative avocation of wildfowl shooting.

Now, of course, there must be a reason for all this. Someone, thereupon, no doubt will remark that the reason is clear: the men are idle vagabonds who prefer loafing in a punt day and night to working all day in a dockyard, for instance. There may be some cases in which the above remark would justly apply. I have known some myself, but that it at all meets the case for the majority of the men is quite an erroneous conclusion. First of all, the idea that punting and loafing are synonymous terms must at once be discarded. I speak feelingly on the point. A man cannot be subjected to any harder work than that of punting. Therefore, to be a successful puntsman, a man must be *primâ facie* no loafer, but far the reverse, and to a hard-working temperament he must add fearlessness, patience, and an iron will that will not take nay for an answer, and will induce him to fight all the elements combined, if need were, if a bag is to be made, rather than come home empty-handed, through fear or laziness.

Those amateurs who have done only day-punting in a double-handed punt, with an experienced puntsman as oarsman and guide, and with every convenience at hand, can but very faintly imagine the hardships of the calling, when

pursued alone, at all times of day and night, and in all weathers; and if they should wish to find out the true state of the case, they should go, on "their own hook," and try, alone, what they could do, say on some cold December night. Their feelings then would be better imagined than described, for, in one word, punting is the hardest and one of the most dangerous of callings, and those who adopt it as a means of living are deservedly held by their neighbours and those who know them best, to constitute a manly, hardy, and clever class of men; second to none for sportsmanship, skill, and pluck. What more can be required of them?

I know that a certain class of men who do not hesitate to kill driven grouse or partridges by the hundreds—and call it grand sport—declare that the punt gun is unsportsmanlike, because it kills many birds at one shot, and maims some more. This latter part cannot be helped. Since the birds *will* congregate in companies and flocks, of course the shot will hit more than one bird, even if an ordinary shoulder gun be used—(that is, of course, if the birds would allow it to get near enough to them to be used). This, however, is very rarely the case, and the birds are generally so hard to get near, that surely several birds at one shot can hardly be begrudged to a man who has been, perhaps, paddling all day or all night in order to get that *one* shot.

Now, which is the best sportsman? He who stands behind a hedge or a mantlet, and pops at driven birds, without even taking the trouble to seek for the birds, or the man who for hours seeks a company of ducks and widgeon, and tries to circumvent them? Which of the two exhibits sporting craft? for that is the test of sport. And, as regards the losing of wounded birds, this occurs wholesale every day at drives and battues—nay, it is systematically admitted that there many "cripples" escape for the time being, since, on the days following grand drives and battues, the keepers invariably must make it a point to hunt with their dogs for wounded birds, and, in some places, cartloads of cripples are thus collected.

Therefore, the cruelty argument, on the ground of "cripples,"

holds quite as good for battueing and driving work as for punting—*ergo*, the less said about it the better. It cannot be altogether prevented, and therefore it must be put up with if wildfowl are to be killed.

Now, a very large proportion of the fowl which are sent to the markets have been got by punting, and this is how punting is professionally carried on:—Sometimes a puntman works single-handed, *i.e.*, he has no partner, owns his own punt and punt gun, and punts alone. Generally he lives in a cottage within a hundred yards or so of a creek, or near the shore of a tidal river, and he follows his calling according to his own inspiration, starting when the wind blows from certain quarters, and at those turns of the tide, and phases of the moon, which experience has taught him were the most likely to ensure success. This man has a certain portion of the river over which he reigns almost supreme, and he is hardly ever disturbed by any other “locals,” who, knowing each other’s favourite bits of ground, take care not to encroach on what has grown very much like a vested interest. Indeed, there are some puntmen who carry this spirit of exclusiveness so far that they will resent any so-called intrusion over that part of a river which they seem to consider their own, in spite of the legal fact that all foreshores and tidal waters are the property of the Crown, and therefore are, as such, open to all comers, except in those few cases where, by special grants, the Crown has given away such rights to the adjoining landowners. I have myself been spoken to more than once in no very friendly spirit by professional puntsmen, who actually told me that I was trespassing! Fancy that, now! Trespassing on sea-water. I have, however, dealt fully with this question, in all its bearings, in an article entitled, “The Rights of Shore Shooters,” which appeared in the *Field* of January 19, 1878, and which will also be found at page 74, Vol. I., of the third series of my “Shooting and Fishing Trips.”

However, a little firmness, and a determination not to be bullied out of one’s rights, go a long way, and I have punted wherever I have fancied, in spite of any efforts to the contrary from those who were interested in having all the fun to

themselves. The best argument to hold out, if the men go too far, is to threaten them with firing your punt gun now and then, so as to frighten away the fowl. This will soon bring them to their senses. Nevertheless, several cases have occurred in which the spirit of exclusiveness got so far the upper hand with the men that they have resorted to personal violence. One, some years ago, deliberately fired his swivel gun into a rival's punt, and maimed the man. The offender was convicted, and, I believe, transported. Personally, I have seen two or three cases of personal encounters with fists and with paddles. But then there will be black sheep in every flock.

Now, in contradistinction with the single-handed puntsman, who lives ashore, are the smackmen, who form a partnership, and, though working each his punt, yet share all the spoils brought in by their united exertions.

This is how the thing is worked. Three, four, or five puntsmen agree to make a campaign together. They prepare a smack, with provisions, water, coals, wood, oil, &c.; they lash on deck three, four, or five punts, get the swivel guns below, out of harm's way, together with their ammunition, and set sail for any spot which they may fancy, where, from past experience, they know that a good anchorage and some shelter will be handy for the smack, and also that wildfowl are to be had in the direct neighbourhood. When they arrive at the anchorage, which is generally in a creek, everything on board the smack is made taut and snug, and one of the men forthwith enters upon his duties as cook-in-chief to the company. Meanwhile his comrades are getting the punts launched, and the punt guns rigged on each, ready for use. The ammunition boxes are placed astern, to trim the punts, and, after a hearty meal, the whole lot (bar one, the cook and caretaker) set out on their expedition, each in a different direction, so as not to interfere with each other's working.

Of course they turn up again at all times, but should one, two, or three *heavy* shots have been made by one of the men, he comes back with his birds as soon as possible, for three reasons:—First, the fowl are scared from his immediate

neighbourhood ; secondly, when his punt is cleared of his bag, he will at once try in another direction ; thirdly, meanwhile a smack might chance to be passing by, when those on board could take the birds ashore, and have them sent on to the station. If no smacks should come by, or, at any rate, none are going the right way, then the puntsmen wait until they have shot a sufficient number of birds, and then two of them sail the smack back with the cargo, and return with provisions and ammunition, or whatever else may be needed.

These puntsmen, almost universally, use ropes to take up the recoil of their punt guns. I have rarely seen a spring recoil frame used by a professional. There is no doubt that rope works off the recoil very smoothly, and it has also this advantage, that it always can easily and cheaply be replaced, if anything should occur to the one in use, or when it is too old, and somewhat rotten, to be any longer reliable, and that is why professionals stick to it right through.

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## CHAPTER XXVI.

### AMATEUR AND PROFESSIONAL PUNTSMEN.

*(Continued.)*

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THERE is no doubt that for an amateur the acme of fun in wild-fowl shooting is to be had by double-handed punting when the fowl are abundant—in this wise, that provided the setter or sculler knows his work thoroughly, and really means to do his best, the amateur enjoys unalloyed sport and does not get fagged over it, as he undoubtedly would, were he to do both paddling and shooting, like the professionals.

In my enthusiasm I have often gone alone punting, even in my double-handed punt, through failing to find ashore a reliable puntsman to come with me, and being so anxious to make a start at once that I would not wait for some good man to return from his trip. Accordingly, alone I would go, and when widgeon, &c., were about, I certainly always did enjoy myself, but not nearly so much as I would have done had I had a puntsman with me. First of all, the labour is excessive. It does not tell very readily on a man who is used to it, and who has all his life lived by hard manual labour; but for a man of sedentary pursuits to enter into the sport without previous training is absolute folly, and even then he will find that, after a certain time spent in rowing and paddling, he will get that fagged that he will grow dispirited, and will care only for one thing—going back ashore, feeling dead beat. Secondly, the monotony of being alone is very depressing. It is all right as long as one can keep lights in

sight, whether ship, or town, or village lights, anywhere; but when right away amidst the flats the silence, utter dreariness, and loneliness of one's surroundings, act very depressingly on one's spirits, particularly if one chances not to fall in with any birds, and waits for hours, may be, in the hope of having a shot. Now, if the amateur, under those circumstances, had even a dog with him, it would be some sort of comfort; but dogs in wildfowling punts are a mistake, notwithstanding that our ancestors often had dogs with them when punting—as witness several prints in my possession (for a facsimile of one of which see folding-plate facing page 89); but then the fowl were more abundant than they are now, and there being by far less fowlers than now, the birds were, moreover, more easily punted to. Nowadays, all this is altered, and unless a dog be positively out of sight and perfectly motionless, he will only spoil one's sport. Therefore the amateur is alone, entirely alone, and, for aught to the contrary, he might think himself in another world. Of course some men do not object to that sort of thing, but others do. Why make a labour and an unpleasant pursuit of a sport? say they. And, to some extent, they are right. I am not a sybarite, but what comforts are to be had I do not see why I should not get; and I therefore take good care to make myself as comfortable and as happy as circumstances will admit, and I think my views on these points will be thoroughly indorsed by every sportsman who reads them.

Now, these being my “sentiments” on the subject, I need not add that, whenever I can manage it, I always prefer double-handed punting to going by myself, and I have made the reasons therefor quite obvious. I like to enjoy myself and not exhaust myself, and I like the society of a fellow being. I reap the advantages of being taken to the best spots, and of interchanging remarks, &c., thus making of the trip a thoroughly enjoyable affair, and, as regards the man, he gets some fun, all the birds that we kill, and his pay—thus, both of us are thoroughly satisfied—and that is as it should be. On the other hand, there is no question that a single-handed punt will often get near birds where a double-handed



one cannot, somehow ; either because the latter, being heavier, is more easily discerned by the fowl, who accordingly fight shy of its approach, or because a heavy double-handed punt is not so quickly and so readily worked. Still, when the weather is very hard, very good sport is to be had even from double-handed punts. Indeed, at such times the professionals themselves often go punting in couples. As regards beginners, whether amateurs or professionals, they must perforce at first go with a man well versed in the art when they wish to learn how to proceed ; hence, my first punting expeditions were with a professional, and I am not likely to forget them in a hurry, or my first single-handed trip either. Howbeit, to begin at the beginning, I will relate how we got on, old Sam and I, on our first joint expedition. Of course I had previously done a good deal of "amateur popping" from a canoe among the creeks, with some equally youthful and equally enthusiastic chums of mine ; but I had never shot from a punt, though I had seen many out, and as for the stanchion guns, why ! I looked upon them with something uncommonly like veneration.

Well, we had often in our rows and sails after shore birds met a weather-beaten puntsman, hale and hearty, though verging upon three-score, and as we were very liberal to him in the matter of glasses of sherry, biscuits, cigars, and powder and shot (simply because we looked upon him as a sort of amphibious demi-god, vastly superior to ourselves—in his wildfowling knowledge, anyhow, since he had been at it from his youth), why, the worthy old fellow gave us many a wrinkle and often put us in the way of making a bag. So we had quite taken a liking to old Sam, and he, in his turn, nothing loth, was also very fond of us.

"I likes," he used to say, "to see young gentlemen like yourselves a-enjoyin' of theirselves with a gun. There be nothink in this 'ere wurld like a gun, masters. Mine is a old 'un," he would add deprecatingly, glancing at his murderous-looking swivel gun, "but she's done a deal of good work, she has ; she has kept me and my missus, and she has kept my two boys and my gal, until they could shift for their-

selves, and to say that I loves my old gun is to say nothink ; if anythink should happen to her, I don't know what I should do, for we have been in punts, she and me, well-nigh forty year now ; we are old friends, we are, and I could not a-bear a partin'."

"You nearly lost her, though, several times—did not you, Sam?"

"Well, yes, sir; six times she has gone to the bottom, but we always got her up all right. I will tell you the tales some day; but it is now getting late, and I must get ready. The fowl have been scarce as yet this season, but there is a good wind now, and the tide will be all right, so I must try to bag a few to-night."

"Could not I go with you?" queried I. "I would not mind giving you a 'quid' and all we kill."

He stroked his grizzly muzzle thoughtfully.

"Well," he said, "I don't know as you might not come, if so you're inclined. Shan't be back till morning, you know."

"Oh, that don't matter. My chums will make that all right at home."

"Very well, sir; then come along. I will borrow my brother Jack's big punt, what he and I use together in winter time, and we will be comfortable."

And that is how it came to pass that on that cold November evening Sam and I made a start in Jack's big punt for a punting expedition.

I was squatting astern, whilst Sam, amidsthips, plied the sculls vigorously. At the bend we fetched the wind, and accordingly the worthy wildfowler shipped his sculls, put up the mast and ran up the square little sail, and, handling a scull astern for rudder, we changed places, he squatting where I was before, and I facing him, with my back near the stock of the punt gun, which grimly stretched its long white barrel over the little deck, forward.

"How many ounces of shot have you got in her?" said I.

"Twelve," replied he.

"And quite enough, too," rejoined I, laughing.

"You're right," said he; "it *do* make a sweep in 'em, when I can find 'em, that's all!"

Thus discoursing, *de choses et autres*, but all about shooting, we went on until we had left far behind us the few shipping lights, as well as the equally few village lights. Around us reigned the utmost silence, save the murmur of the sea, which gently told "tales" against the side of the punt, and the flapping to and fro of the little tanned sail, as the gentle breeze toyed with it, and onwards sped us. Then the "flats" appeared, dark and slimy, and as we drew near, strange noises arose, many shore birds which were feeding along the water's edge taking the alarm as we glided past them, and they flew over and around us in dismayed confusion, only to settle again a few minutes later, when finding that they were not to be molested.

We still went on, both of us looking out and listening intently, in case some shot might have occurred on our way. Meanwhile the moon arose, and then I must say that the scene was wonderfully brighter, as the rays lighted up the creeks like so many streaks of silver, and so light in fact did the night turn up, that for some no inconsiderable distance we could see right ahead of us.

"The tide is agoing to make," quoth Sam, "we will wait in this 'ere creek; the birds won't be long coming, now."

So saying, he got on his knees, tripped up mast and sail bodily, tied them together with a halyard, shoved them under the deck out of the way, paddled up the creek, and then he crawled up to the gun to look at the priming.

"Now, may we have the luck to get birds sent us!" exclaimed he, fervently.

And I said, "Amen!" to that from the innermost recesses of my soul.

To say that I was wild with excitement is to express but very feebly my feelings at that moment, and the faint roar of a punt gun fired some miles away from us filled me with enthusiasm.

"That is my brother Jack," quoth the puntsman, "I'll swear!"

"But," said I, "won't he disturb our birds?"

"O dear no! He is a long way off."

"Still, it would be better if he did not fire at all—would it not?"

"Well, yees, perhaps; but then, we all must live."

This conversation was carried on in whispers, although there was no immediate call for our being cautious; but all puntsmen get into the habit of never speaking aloud when afloat, as they argue, and rightly so, that silence should be, as much as possible, the golden rule in a punt.

"S'posin' burds do turn up," quoth Sam, "will *you* fire at them?"

"No," said I, "I know I would miss them. I have never fired a punt gun, so I don't understand it. Let me see you do it first, and then I will have a try."

"So you shall," said he, "and, if we don't find fowl, I tell ye what we'll do; I shall load the gun lightly, and when going home in the morning you might fire it for practice on them curlews and other shore birds, as they feed along the creeks."

And so it was agreed; but my first shot, nevertheless, and a successful one, too (favourable omen of a successful wildfowl shooting career, Sam averred afterwards), was at ducks; but of this more anon. Faithful to our programme, I remained passive astern, and Sam did everything—I observing all his movements, with *all* my eyes.

Paddle, paddle, paddle went the paddles, gently, as we headed the coming-in tide.

Presently: "I hears burds," quoth Sam, in a low key, "Now for it; make yourself as small as you can, sir; don't show yourself under any consideration, don't move, don't cough, don't sneeze, don't speak, until the gun is fired or the birds have gone."

"Right!" I said; but I thought it would be something awful to remain so still so long, and I dreaded lest any titillation of my nose might set me sneezing in the nick of time, in spite of all my efforts. However, I managed capitally—at least, so the old man told me afterwards. Howbeit, now that

the punt was steadily kept going, in the intervals of the recovery of the paddles, by listening intently, I could hear a strange noise ahead of us. It was not unlike the faint murmurs of a distant crowd of people; but now and then some strange notes, the "wheehs!" of widgeon, gave the sounds a weird intonation; and when I state that I was quite breathless I only state the bare fact.

"What a lot of birds there must be!" I thought; and nearer and nearer we drew to them, they coming to us with the tide, and Sam, with his paddles, steadily heading towards them.

We were both lying down at full length on our stomachs, my head reaching up to his waist, and he, with his head now on the port side, and now on the starboard side, squinted ahead to watch for their appearance.

He at last nudged me, and I cautiously peeped over the gun'ale.

Jehoshaphat! What a sight! Right in the moonbeams as they played over the sea was a flock of at least a thousand birds, diving, gambolling, feeding, quarrelling, "charming" away to their heart's content. The noise of their bills as they fed was perfectly noticeable amidst their cries, as they came on, and we drew nearer and nearer to them; and at last when I saw Sam eyeing them over the gun barrel, and fiddling about with his right hand for the trigger string, I held my breath for good, and my heart died within me.

"Ahoy!" shouts Sam.

A roar like that of a cannon, a cloud of smoke as thick as a house, a rush of thousands of wings and loud startled cries as the safe members of the flock rise and sheer off, a splashing about, here and there, on the water in front of us, and when the smoke clears up, what appears to me to be at least a score of dark bodies, float about on the moonlit wavelets, and seven or eight more birds, only crippled, are tumbling about or swimming away, in the hope of escaping.

"Let them have it!" quoth Sam, joining action to the words, for the words were scarcely out of his mouth than from

his double-barrelled gun there issue two flashes, and two of the cripples are laid out—like rags.

I then stand up, too, and pepper two more.

"Reload quickly, master," says the fowler, "with your breechloader we will manage them nicely."

He seizes the paddles, and rows me right in the midst of the lot.

'Bang! Bang! Two more are settled. Open the gun, pitch out the cases, thrust in two fresh cartridges. Bang! Bang! at two others. In a moment the work was done.

"There be three or four more gone away somewhere," says the man; then, "but we need not bother about 'em just now. Let's pick up the lot here, and we will see if we can find any afterwards."

No sooner said than done. He did the rowing, and I did the picking up, and when all were safe in the punt we counted twenty-three birds, ducks and widgeons.

"Bravo, Sam!" cried I, delighted. "You did it right well!"

"Thank you, sir," said he, mopping his brow, as I handed him a large glass full of sherry, and he took forthwith a celestial observation, after which he handed me the glass (empty), wiped his mouth on his sleeve, and two happier mortals, for the time being, were probably not to be found on the surface of the globe—at that time of night, anyhow.

When we came to our senses, after that little bit of elation which is inseparable from success in whatever form, Sam resumed his paddles, and rowed up to a flat, in order to re-load his gun.

Rattle, rattle, rattle went the big pebbles of powder down the old barrel; then the old man carefully primed the nipple, replaced the gun on its rest, with recoil rope fixed up all right, and we got under way once more, but only came up to three ducks, just at dawn of day.

Quoth Sam, "Come for'ard, sir, and give it 'em. You have only to let fly right at 'em when I nudges you."

Which let fly I did, and so successfully that I killed two of the birds and crippled the third. We got him after a smart chase, as he kept on diving most annoyingly, and thus ended my first wildfowl shooting trip in a double-handed punt.

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

### SHOULDER GUNS.

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I now come to the shoulder guns used occasionally when punting. There are some shoulder muzzle-loading guns, of very large bores, on various plans of ignition, still used by professionals and amateurs for wildfowl shooting from punts, but in breech-loaders there are no shoulder guns built larger than 4-bores. (By the way, this number is a misnomer, for in fact these guns, though taking a so-called 4-bore cartridge, are in reality but 6-bore guns; but let that pass.) Now, a great discrepancy exists between the loads used for guns of the same bores by various sportsmen. One will load his 4-bore, for instance, with 9drs. and 3oz.; another will be content with 8drs. and 3oz.; and a third professes to fire 7drs. only and 3oz.; whilst others reduce their shot to 2½oz. or 2¾oz., and various loads of powder.

All this is very conflicting to the beginner; and what makes the matter worse is that the name of the powder makers and the number used are mixed in irretrievable confusion; and now, worse still, come the Schultze loads, which baffle the tyros exceedingly, judging by the letters which I frequently receive on the subject. Still, the matter is simple enough. It should be remembered that the heavier a gun is, generally speaking, the heavier loads will it carry. *Ergo*, all those striking differences in loading have their *raison d'être*; i.e., the weight and idiosyncracies of the particular weapons have to be studied. Therefore, any purchaser of a 4-bore



gun should himself ascertain (or cause the makers to ascertain for him) the loads which are suited to his own weapon. No other plan is satisfactory, as no two guns of the same bore will fire exactly the same loads equally well if their weights are very different.

One of my 4-bores, which is by Messrs. Tolley, of Birmingham, weighs 13lb., and I fire from it 140grs. of Schultze and 3oz. of shot, the same loads as for my other 4-bores by Bland, and, again, Tolley, which weigh 15lb., but that is because the difference in weight is but trifling. A pad should always be used. It inspires one with far greater confidence to feel safe with a soft cushion than when placing the hard butt end of the stock against one's already sore shoulder and arm; and the truth of aim is also more likely to be attained, as no consideration of recoil and its effects will bother the shooter's mind. Nothing is more detrimental to accurate shooting than dreading a recoil, and feeling already sore; and since the pads obviate all this, why not resort to them? Ay, why not?

A good 4-bore ought to kill for certain, if held straight, up to 100 yards or so, at the very least; but fancy shots up to 150 yards had better be left out of the question. I have sometimes killed (as far as I could estimate) up to 120 yards in a company; but I have missed, too, at that range.

Now, punters who meet with two or three birds together at sea will use their big shoulder guns in preference to firing their punt guns, and if they can get within range a 4-bore is quite sufficient for the business on hand.

Any guns larger than 4-bore must have their stocks very heavily padded. Guns carrying five or six or more ounces of shot, even when very heavy weapons, kick most tremendously; hence sheep-skin bolsters are then "the order of the day." These guns, or else 4-bore guns, are, however, necessary when, for instance, the puntsman from a creek at low tide can only pole his craft up to birds which are feeding above him on the saltings. In this case he cannot bring his punt gun to bear on the birds, since they are sometimes considerably above the level of his punt; and, if he had

to wait until his craft was floated up by the tide sufficiently high to fire his stanchion into them, he would run the chance of meanwhile losing the birds should they be disturbed by someone else. In such a case, over the saltings, a heavy shoulder gun comes very handy; and if the stock is well padded, and the gun is a properly built and properly balanced weapon, the shooter can use it with terrible effect on the unsuspecting fowl by rising gently in his punt until he can sight the birds. A most curious phenomenon in connection with wildfowl is that, if properly attired, a man's head does not seem to scare them if it is not moved at all and they can see nothing more of the man above the saltings. I have often thus popped up amongst thousands of birds, and they appeared stupefied enough to allow me to deliberately aim and fire at them. Indeed, I have looked at some for many minutes, waiting until they crowded. Of the muzzle-loading guns thus used I need say nothing. Of the 4-bore guns, I may add that they are now generally built on the central-fire system—they are single barrels, but a few double-barrelled ones are now and then made to order.

4-bore green cartridge cases are lined with tin sheeting up to more than half their length. This, however, does not prevent these cases from being available once only; for, paper and tin alike are generally split through, sometimes in two, three, or more places by the explosion; at least, that has been my experience with thousands of them. Therefore, no recapper will be wanted if paper cases are exclusively used; and, as regards steel cases, it will depend whether the caps are put on inside the cases, as in paper cases, or outside the cases, on a nipple, as it is done for the steel cases used for some central-fire punt guns. If a man goes in an out-of-the-way place or abroad for wildfowl shooting, and intends using a breechloading 4-bore gun, he should either provide a good stock of paper cases or some steel cases, or both. Abroad, no larger than 12-bore cases are manufactured, except in America, and at Liege in Belgium, since quite lately, by the Eley Company, who have opened there a branch factory, if I recollect aright. Anywhere else no cases could be had for love or money, and as late as a few years

ago, when I was shooting in Belgium, I had even to import 10-bore cases, as none were made over there ; and I was charged an extortionate import duty of 4s. per hundred for the lot I got sent from England.

As regards the "cripple" guns used when punting, double-12-bores, central-fire, full-choked, will be found all that can be desired. To fire such guns from a single-handed punt, kneeling on both knees or on the right knee will be found the safest and best posture. No. 5 shot will also be found the best all round, except for swans or geese, when No. 1 or 2 will be necessary.

The chambers of all wildfowl guns ought to be bored a shade easy, so as to offer no difficulty whatsoever to quick loading or unloading. This feature is always desirable in all guns, but more particularly so with wildfowl guns, because the latter are exposed to all weathers, and when snow or sleet, or rain is falling, the wet has a knack of reaching the breech end and spoiling the cartridge cases, which are then apt to bulge and stick when you want to withdraw them, and I need not add that when this does occur it is anything but pleasant to the sportsman.

I know nothing more "riling" than to find oneself thus stopped in the midst of a "cripple" chase by a case which obstinately refuses to come out. Indeed, it has sometimes occurred to me that so great was the grip of the cases (which no doubt had been so soddened by wet as to bring out all their sticking properties), that in central-fire guns they would allow the extractor to slip over them, rather than move at all, in which case there is nothing to be done but to unscrew the extractor, pull it out bodily, and then with a ramrod from the muzzle to shove the luckless case out. But when this is done care should be taken to well wipe and well grease the chamber ; for it will be found that the adhesive constituents of the last troublesome case have so soiled the chamber, that no sooner will a fresh cartridge be put in (if no cleaning precautions have been taken) than it will begin to act precisely like its predecessor, and, when dried, it will hold in as fast as the one that gave so much trouble.

That this sort of accident is of very frequent occurrence is notorious to all boat gunners; indeed, Mr. Booth declared, in *The Field*, that one day three barrels out of his two double pin-fire breechloaders were rendered useless by the fact of the cartridges breaking, and he having no time to extract them. By the way, I wonder that Mr. Booth uses pin-fires—they are so awkward, generally, in bad weather, as witness his own experience, through the cases sticking in, and not being so easily extracted as from central-fires. Still, as I have shown, even in the latter, cartridges occasionally do stick. I rarely take with me more than one cripple gun, and that gun is a double central-fire; and it has occurred now and then in bad weather that one barrel became useless through a case bulging. This generally I found out when I was trying to change a cartridge for another of larger or smaller shot; and my general advice on the subject would be to close the gun and fire off the charge, when it will be found that the empty case will be far more easily managed than the full cartridge, whose wads sometimes, by being a bit large, cause all the mischief. Indeed, I have now a double central-fire, whose left chamber is so tight that I rarely can remove a cartridge therefrom, even in dry weather. This will have to be seen to, of course, as it is a great nuisance at all times to be stopped or even delayed in the midst of one's sport.

The best plan would be not only to have the chambers bored wide, and to grease them well, as well as the cartridges, but to have sufficiently powerful extractors laying hold of more than a third of the rim of the cartridges, as is but usually the case. Messrs. Rigby and some other makers, if I mistake not, have fitted removable extractors to their central-fire guns. That is a step in the right direction.

I have also seen a double central-fire hammerless gun in Messrs. Reilly's branch establishment in Oxford-street, near the Regent-circus, which struck me as being pre-eminently suited for boat work. First, it is hammerless, a great advantage this for guns that are used on board yachts, dinghies, or punts, for you will find that the hammers of ordinary guns have always a knack for getting in the way of the oars, the seats,

or the ribs of the craft. I have had dozens of hammers broken or bent thus. *Ergo*, hammerless guns would be a great improvement. Secondly, the gun I am alluding to extracted empty cases, but left the loaded cartridges in their chambers, and the mechanism was so arranged that, if only one case were empty, that one only was removed ; and the quickness of handling was simply admirable. I have had the gun in my hands, and have worked it myself. The extractor, instead of being in one piece, as is usually the case in central-fires, is slit in two, so to speak, in the middle, thus forming two distinct extractors, one for each case. Now, some interior mechanism connects each extractor with the corresponding trigger. Pull, say, the right trigger—the right cartridge is exploded, and simultaneously a spring is made to act on the right extractor with such effect, that when you open the breech, away flies the empty right case, it being literally pitched out of the chamber. Meanwhile the left cartridge, which has not been interfered with, remains placidly in its place. Then shut the gun again, pull the left trigger, away goes the left load. Open the gun, and out flies the left cartridge. If you fire both barrels, away fly both cases when you open the gun.

Now, for cripple work, I know of no gun better fitted than that system of gun would be, provided it be not liable to get out of order ; for, necessarily, the mechanism must be somewhat intricate, and more complicated than is the case with ordinary breechloaders. But, taking for granted that the gun will stand rough work and usage, then, I say emphatically, that a better and more handy weapon need not be looked for. A “cripple” chase is always a lively affair, in which seconds are precious. A moment lost often allows the cripples to get out of range, or dive, and thus a long and fruitless chase is entailed upon the sportsman, who, had he had a quickly managed weapon, would have done his work without loss of time. I understand that the gun I am alluding to has taken honours at the Paris Exhibition. I, however, have not heard the name of the inventor.

Whilst this topic was being treated of, an esteemed correspondent, "Equor," wrote :—

I have read with the greatest interest and pleasure "Wildfowler's" articles in the *Field*, and, as I have during my peregrinations used most of the modern shooting irons, from a whale gun, an elephant rifle, and a punt gun, down to Holland's little rook rifle, perhaps "Wildfowler" will kindly permit me to make the following remarks :

I condemned the central-fire cripple gun for the very same reasons "Wildfowler" states, *i.e.*, the cartridges getting behind the extractor, and, my hands being benumbed with cold, it took a long time to set matters to rights. I then got a snap action (Needham's patent) pin-fire gun, with pistol-handle stock, 12-gauge, right-hand medium, left full choke. The cartridges of course stuck, but I gave the empty cases a tip with the old loading-rod, and all was square at once. I had this stock made two inches shorter than my ordinary guns, and, when summer came, I used it on board the larger yacht. I put what the Dutch boers call "roer schoon," *i.e.*, a shoe to lace on the heel of the stock, and having inside it one, two, or three small leather pads stuffed with horsehair ; this I used with the elephant and buffalo guns, and with them you do not feel the discharge of a heavily charged gun so violently.

"Equor's" Dutch plan of the "roer schoon" is very satisfactory, but here one can rarely find a maker willing to make and fit anything of the sort to his guns. Nay, most sportsmen will remember the great opposition which some makers set up against the "Silver" pads, and other anti-recoil pads. "It would spoil the looks of the guns," they argued, and I have known a man who positively declined to reduce the length of stock of one of his guns ; he would rather lose his customer, "He was not going to spoil his handiwork, not he !" &c. Bravo, old notions !

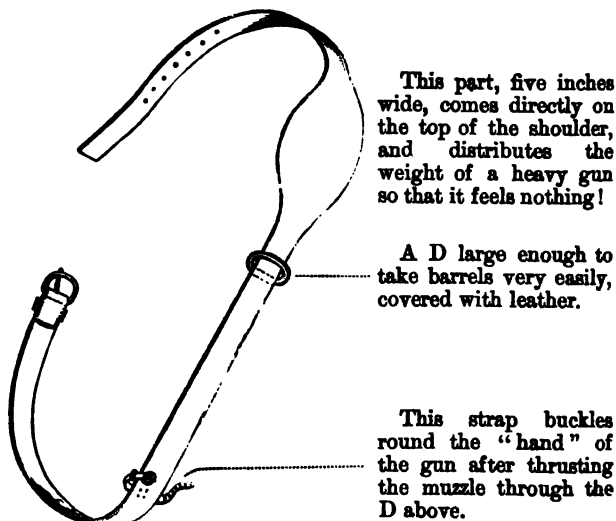
We have, however, "changed all that" now, to some extent, but there remains a good deal yet to be done in that line. Thus, for instance, we rarely see shot guns fitted with slings ; yet, how very handy it is in cold weather to be able to carry one's gun comfortably on one's back (when going home, for instance) and put one's hands in one's pockets ; or, when a lot of things or many birds have to be carried, &c., it is very handy to have both hands free. But one does not see one gun in ten thousand fitted thus. On the Continent, however, the reverse is the rule. I never saw a gun of Continental make that was not fitted with a sling ;

in short, foreigners like their comforts. We don't care much about these, generally speaking, and certainly, to some extent, this feature is desirable. Thus, I saw in France a native sportsman who went wildfowl shooting with a muff hanging from his neck, and into this muff he thrust his hands with quite native elegance! They were a nice couple—he and the muff; in fact, a couple of muffs—as I can personally testify, for I saw him fire repeatedly, but he never shot anything, not he!

To my notions about slings "Equor" very kindly replied:—

As "Wildfowler" likes to carry his shoulder gun in a sling on his back sometimes, and knows the value of it, I will send him one with which he can carry any ordinary gun, from a buffalo gun of 8 calibre to Holland's little rifle, far easier than by any strap fastened to the barrel and stock of gun. I have ridden many hundred miles with my gun in this sling, and proved it well.

I have since used "Equor's" sling a great deal, and I truly appreciate it, as I do not really see why one should have to



N.B.—Both buckles should be leather covered.

carry a heavy double 8-bore, for instance, in one's hand or on one's shoulder, when one is going home on a hard-freezing

evening. Slinging one's gun on one's back is a decided improvement; *ergo*, many thanks to "Equor," on my part, at any rate.

Doubtless, many sportsmen would be glad to avail themselves also of some similar plan of relieving themselves from the trouble of carrying their guns in their hands, and for their benefit I append a cut of a sling (see opposite page) which was sent me by "one who has fired 20,000 trial shots."

The plan is exceedingly ingenious, and, like all really good things, it is simple and inexpensive.

Reverting, however, to sticky cartridges, another correspondent said:

I feel sure "Wildfowler" is desirous of making his articles on modern wildfowling trustworthy and reliable, and will not take amiss these few remarks.

First, most of the troubles he gets into with tight cartridges in using his cripple gun, are of his own making. He tells us frequently the cause of the cartridges sticking is, that the wads have in loading bulged out the cases beyond their proper size. Now why does he not use a cartridge corrector or sizer. This would, with but little trouble, insure them all being of a uniform and proper gauge. And if, when the cartridges have been properly loaded, a thin coat of varnish (as recommended in the *Field*) were put on them, it would prevent the immediate effect of rain or snow on the cases, and the grease being used outside the varnish, renders it more effective, as it is not so readily absorbed into the case.

He is also wrong in recommending that the breech chambers of all guns be made rather large. This does not render the extraction of the case easier. The gun that has its chambers made to fit the case, if the chambers are properly bored out, will present no difficulties; whereas the large chambered guns are very frequently the cause of cases bursting at rim. The separating of metal from paper of the case—a very troublesome thing—is also produced by the same cause. Besides, wide chambers will affect the strength of shooting of a gun.

It is the difficulties arising from no fault that can be by foresight guarded against (and they are not few) that require the attention of "Wildfowler's" experienced pen.

G. T. BARTRAM.

To this I replied: Mr. Bartram gives excellent advice, but he blames me when I am not aware that I am to be blamed. He writes: "He ('Wildfowler') tells us frequently the cause of his cartridges sticking is that the wads have, in loading, bulged out beyond their proper size." Now, I have not said anything of the sort, and it is not the wads that do the



mischief I am complaining of; it is simply the wet from either rain or sea water. And I am *not* wrong in recommending rather easy chambers, because if they are not easy, wet cartridges will not get in at all; and as to the cases bursting if the chambers are easy, I don't care a pin for that—let them burst; all I care is to be able to kill, and to reload quickly. The rest does not trouble me, as I never reload cases, and if they are burst in the body or at the rim I pay no attention to it, unless the paper is completely separated from the brass—in which case I extract it the best way I can, and thank my stars that the difficulty was not worse. What I contend is, that a wet cartridge left standing for some time will *not* get in a tight chamber at all on any terms; *ergo*, better take the lesser evil, *i.e.*, run the risk of bursting the case, or of having somewhat inferior shooting, and yet kill your bird, rather than be stuck with a beastly cartridge half in and half out, which will neither get in wholly nor come out clear, and which, by preventing you from closing your gun, puts a stop to your sport altogether.

Punt shooting and field shooting are two very different things. In the one you are pretty able to attend to your weapons and implements; in the other you cannot; and the chief difficulty to contend against, then, as regards ammunition, is wet, from either the sky or the sea.

To this Mr. Bartram retorted:

"Wildfowler," contradicts me, and says he did not attribute the sticking of the cartridges to their being bulged out beyond their proper size by the wadding when loading them. Here are his own words: "I have not said anything of the sort, and it is not the wads that do the mischief." A reference to his letter would have prevented this reckless assertion. I will content myself by giving his own words as they appear in the article upon which I commented: "The wads sometimes by being a bit large cause all the mischief."

I should be sorry if Mr. Bartram and myself should fail to agree on the trivial matter he refers to. He had said, "Most of the troubles he ('Wildfowler') gets into with tight cartridges are of his own making." (Flattering this, considering that I never now load my cartridges!) Then he went on: "He tells us *frequently* the cause of the cartridges

sticking in is that the wads have, in loading, bulged out the cases beyond their proper size. Now, why does he not," &c. Now, I did not say *frequently*; on the contrary, I said *sometimes*, which in most people's understanding means "now and then," and not "frequently." I repeat it: The most frequent source of sticking in with wildfowling pieces is the weather and sea water. Nevertheless the suggestion made by Mr. Bartram was a good one, only I do not see why I should have to put every one of my cartridges through a sizer. The makers should issue cartridges fully ready for use.

Now, metallic cases, if they were to be relied upon in all other respects, would be the very thing for cripple guns. Unfortunately, they are not usually so good as paper cases, as regards actual shooting; but, as concerns extraction, they never stick, if the extractors are strong enough and in good working order, and the cases are well turned out. In America, I am told, many sportsmen use metallic cases. Here such are rarely resorted to for shot guns. I do not remember ever having met more than one or two shooters who used them systematically, and they did it, I believe, for economy's sake. But, supposing these cases shot as well as paper cases, what a boon they would prove for wildfowl shooters! Now, I have often in day trips taken on board with me one of Holland's rook and rabbit rifles (with which I have, by the way, done wonderful execution on single large birds—run the punt ashore, lean the barrel on the fore wash streaks, aim steadily, and you will be surprised how true the bullet will speed to its billet); but what I wished to point out was how easily the empty cases were disposed of—never the slightest bother in all weathers. I wish shot guns with paper cases would act as well in that as in other respects.

On this point "Equor" wrote:—

I do not wish to intrude my observations in any way against "Wildfowler's" thorough knowledge of the subject he writes on, as I am by no means A. 1 at punt shooting, my penchant having been four-footed game in the countries I have been in; but I was much pleased to see "Wildfowler" like to use the little .380 rifle. I myself find it a most pleasant companion, and so very true.

And another correspondent also sent the following:—

I think if "Wildfowler" and other big-gunners would take the trouble to varnish the butt-ends of the cases, avoiding the brass, they would find the chance of their sticking in the chambers greatly reduced where it arises from damp swelling the paper. The varnish should be made simply of shellac and methylated spirit, not too thick; this will dry in five or six minutes, and should be thinned, to soak well into the paper of the cases; if too thin, a second coat is desirable; but, if too much is applied, it will sometimes cause the very nuisance it is intended to prevent. I have used this plan with the common brown cases, and found it answer exceedingly well. If the cartridges are to be carried in the pocket, and are thus liable to get wet or damp, varnish the entire case after turning over.

This is, most certainly, a wrinkle worth knowing, but, in my opinion, the trade should attend to these things, and not leave them to sportsmen to see to, themselves.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### SHOULDER GUNS—(*Continued.*)

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ONE rock on which most young sportsmen rarely fail to come to grief is the proper length of their guns' stocks. Now, this is a most essential affair, yet systematically it is neglected, the same gun being used in autumn, winter and spring, when one's clothing varies very greatly, and when, therefore, the length of the stocks should be regulated accordingly. One gun for each season would be the thing; but comparatively few men could afford the expense. They could, however, afford two or three recoil pads of different thicknesses, and put them on and take them off at will, when they would find a vast improvement in their shooting, especially for flying shots. It stands to reason that, if a gun suits a man when he is in his summer toggery, it cannot fit him when he has two great coats on, besides very thick underclothing; yet this is tried on year after year and season after season, with the most extraordinary complacency. (I plead guilty to the deed myself, and think I was fearfully innocent.) Nevertheless, I daresay it will take a long time to convert the bulk of shooters to my way of thinking on the subject. Shooters are the most conservative of men. They will all say, "He is right; we ought to have thought of that!" but they will, nevertheless, ever after go on in the same old groove, and use the same old gun with the same old length of stock. I have, however, had my say on the point, at any rate; whether the hint will bear fruit or not remains to be seen.

There is another point on which shooters widely disagree, and that is about concentrators. Now, I have tried many concentrators. I have with some killed a few heads of game at a trifle under one hundred yards; I have missed a good many under half that distance; and I have "balled" up to fifty yards into a few; from whence I conclude that concentrators, up to my last trials, were not to be relied upon. But, mind, that is only my experience. My guns may have been to blame, or my loads may have been wrong; but one thing which was perfectly clear to me was that concentrators with *my* guns were unsatisfactory, and more than that I cannot tell.

And now as to the loads for cripple guns. From the beginning of the season until the cold weather sets in, a 12-bore ordinarily chambered gun, full choked, loaded with 3drs., or 42grs. of Schultze and 1½oz. of shot, No. 5 and No. 2, I have found quite sufficient. When once hard weather becomes the order of the day, I prefer a full-choked, long-chambered gun, taking the long cases; and the loads then are 45grs. and 1½oz. of shot.

Whenever a long-chambered gun is used, none but full loads (as above described) should be resorted to. Ordinary cartridges in a long-chambered gun shoot quite too awfully bad—at least, that has been my experience on the subject. As for using long cartridges in ordinary guns, that is quite out of the question, as they won't even get in. One point in connection with long-chambered guns should be well attended to, and that is their actions, which under the severe strain are apt to allow gaping in time, if not extra substantially made. The range obtained with first-rate full-choke shoulder guns is simply astounding, and none can better see it than wildfowl shooters, since they can generally, more or less, trace the trajectory of their shot over the water or on the flats. Thus I have often been surprised to see No. 2 shot striking at many yards over a hundred. The question, however, is to get good killing power up to sixty yards, or thereabouts if possible; beyond that range, unless with an extreme elevation of the gun (which is quite either a fluke or an art), the shot will not strike full, and hence a miss, or a very slight

cripple, will be the result. In the United States some sportsmen use brass cases (usually nickel-plated, to prevent rust) from which such loads as 4drs. of black powder and 1½oz. of shot are fired from heavy 12-bore guns. The range and penetration are then admittedly excellent, and greatly above the usual degrees obtained with ordinary guns; and, of course, if the shot strikes full, most extraordinary results must be produced, fowl being bagged at unheard-of distances. But then the question is, how to make the loads strike full. In a rifle, sights are provided for elevation; in shot guns these cannot be resorted to, and therefore the sportsman must intuitively give his weapon the proper elevation for a certain range to effect a kill. This is the stumbling-block for all long-range shot gun shooting; and, from my own little experience, I have come to the conclusion that there is absolutely no certainty to kill a fowl at or above sixty yards range with an ordinary 12-bore. *Ergo*, if a gun can give a fair pattern, and especially a good penetration, point blank at that range, that is about the best gun that a wildfowl shooter can use for "cripple" work, since beyond that distance, owing to the motion of the sea, and the low position of the shooter in his punt, he can hardly cover the "cripple" well; and if he could see it well beyond that, the probability would be great that his shot would fall low. It should, however, be well understood that I have no wish to impose my views on other sportsmen. I merely state what I have observed with my own guns; and if I should differ in my opinions from other shooters, why, perhaps our respective guns, or our respective selves, are to blame for the discrepancy. I have shot dead at eighty yards (and perhaps more) some lively cripples, but I have also missed many under that range; but up to sixty yards, with a good gun, a cripple ought to be either killed outright, or so completely maimed that it should hardly be able to make another attempt at escape. Anyhow, one thing is clear—if the cripple is still lively after one such shot (provided the gun be known to be A 1), the shooter himself is at fault. He, however, sees perfectly well where his shot strikes, and thus his defective aim, in whichever way, will be made

so self-evident that he can easily correct it for his second barrel.

The shoulder cripple gun should be placed under the star-board side, and hung up there with its muzzle turned forward, and slightly upward, and a strip of tarpaulin or oilskin should hang in front of it so as to protect it from rain or spray; but some men place their cripple guns under the deck, laying them flat, together with the ammunition boxes.

Speaking about ammunition reminds me of the experiments about different ways of loading cartridges, which have of late been carried out by the editor of the *Field*. The value of such experiments cannot be overrated, but it is astonishing how slow the trade are to take the hint. The way cartridges are loaded for the public in many second and third rate dealers' establishments is simply disgraceful; and it is high time that such things should be exposed. Let anyone go into many such shops, and there, in a casual way, purchase a few loaded cartridges in each shop; then let him go home and examine them, and he will find in many cases bad powder in very small quantity; then two or three thick wads filling up the case, and a few shots at the top, will complete a dose, which is simply an abominable swindle. Not very long ago I bought thus fifty cartridges; I was on my way to catch a train, and found I was short of ammunition, and the result was that I paid 6s. or 7s. for fifty cases of rubbish which could not kill a bird at twenty yards! And the loading! Why, half the wads were too small and rotten, and, if sufficiently large, they were placed whistle-shape, anyhow, but the top one was artistically turned down. This is barefaced robbery. Now that knowledge on the subject is getting widespread, let every sportsman examine his cartridges, and insist upon having them properly loaded. It is as absurd to go shooting with bad cartridges as to expect to shoot birds with a broomstick. Many men load their own cartridges—that is the most satisfactory plan. But should some makers positively guarantee first-rate powder and shot in cartridges, and careful loading, those makers would confer a boon on the shooting public, and I warrant they would find it pay, and pay well, too. Now,

for wildfowl shooting extra good cartridges are of the highest importance, and, unless the sportsman uses such, and no other, his success must be absolutely *nil*. *Verbum sap.*

"One who has fired 20,000 shots" wrote to say that he is of my opinion concerning the usual run of cartridges to be bought at any but first-rate establishments. The evil is a widespread one, and it is really surprising to think that it has been allowed to grow unchecked to such an almost universal extent. The cap will fit a good many heads, I am afraid, and no doubt "One who has fired" and myself will be very heartily "blessed," or otherwise; but that, of course, we can't help, and we will do our best not to mind—with tolerable success, I am pretty certain.

The varnishing of cases, so as to prevent them from sticking, I was aware of, but I have never tried it. Somehow, I don't fancy meddling with my cartridges. My cook will not allow me into *her* kitchen, for one thing, and, of course, I could not think of going against that autocrat—and where else could I concoct the brewing? Moreover, I have a hazy idea that everything that ought to be done towards making cartridges perfect for use should be done by the trade, and I don't see why we shooters should have to improve, after having paid for, the goods. Really, it is only sportsmen that will put up so good-naturedly with bad, inferior, or unsatisfactory implements. Would a lady think of "moiring" her silk, for instance, if she did not find the lot she had bought "moired" enough. No, then why should we have to render our cartridges waterproof? Why don't the trade see to it? That is their business—it ought not be ours. Ours is to fire the cartridges. Theirs ought to be to provide them perfect for all weathers.

Now, let some maker take up this idea, and, sirs, he will, depend upon it, make a fortune. "Cartridges warranted perfectly loaded, and thoroughly waterproof," would have a perfect run.

This question of keeping cartridges dry has always been a puzzling one—particularly to wildfowl shooters. Once I devised a coat with waterproof pockets, but it got on very



well only as long as the weather was dry! for, as soon as snow or rain was falling, either of these ingratiated itself somehow into the pockets, and then it was worse than ever; for, however difficult it may be to keep the wet out of one's pockets, it is still more difficult to get them cleared of it when once it is in. And, then, wildfowl shooting from a punt, especially when the shooter works single-handed and does the picking up as well as the shooting, is very wet work indeed; and when one picks up a dozen birds, dead or wounded, as a rule, one's hands are well splashed with water, and now and then bloody as well, together with, maybe, a few loose feathers stuck on here and there. Well, then, if one has still a few cripples about, when loading the cripple gun in a hurry one is sure to wet the cartridges. Now, if you there and then fire and extract the cases, they will come out readily enough—their sticking properties have not had yet sufficient time to be developed; but each succeeding cartridge brings into the chamber its quota of mud, water, and blood, and eventually the last two cartridges, which are put in when the work on hand is over, get thoroughly impregnated with the wet in the chambers and their own; and, if they stand long enough idle in the gun, there is a good chance that they will stick in for good, unless extreme measures are adopted to expel them. Now, that is *my* experience. I may be more careless than other shooters; but certainly, when I have been successful, my punt, my guns, my clothes, and myself, are all in the most terrible mess imaginable. How it occurs I don't know; all I know is that I can't help it. I don't mind anything, provided I score; and I think this is a true motto to act up to, especially in that branch of shooting. Of course, in a double-handed punt, if one's man is really handy, one might shoot in kid gloves and not soil them if so inclined, since positively there is no occasion to handle anything but the guns; and, unless it rains or snows, everything is snug and dry enough forward in the punt, whatever may be the case astern, where the dead birds are piled up—wet, bloody, and muddy maybe.

“Cigarette” agreed, thusly:—

Now, with all punters, I have suffered the great inconvenience of car-

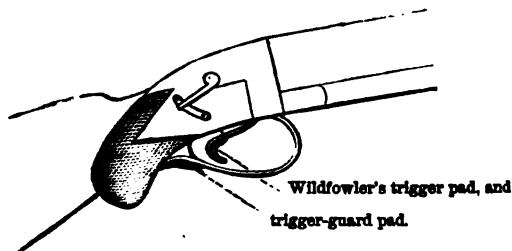
tridges sticking, and have, before now, been in the melancholy position of seeing cripples bobbing all round me, and not being able to shoot—only to swear roundly, and cut my fingers; and how one does cut oneself sometimes, trying to get out an obstinate cartridge, everybody knows. What I did long ago, and advise all others to do, from the satisfaction it gave me, is to take your cripple-stopper to a gunmaker, and to get him to fit a stout brass ramrod to it. My experience is, if you take out a ramrod loose with you, that, when wanted in a hurry, as it always is, you will get hold of every article in your punt first, including oars, paddles, telescope, loading-rod, before you find it, and where are your cripples then? As long as the skies continue to rain upon mortal man, and the frost to freeze, so will cartridges stick; and I agree and sympathise with "Wildfowler" and others. The next thing, however, to curing is improving; and I do this, first, by the ramrod, as I above described, and, secondly, by keeping my cartridges dry, and here is a hint on that head—for bags and pockets, however deftly made, are never waterproof, that I could discover.

I have alongside, and opposite to, the stock of my gun, and about an inch under the deck, a neat small box, with a sliding end, the box of course securely fastened to the punt, and in the most convenient place for reaching out a cartridge. The sliding end takes out to fill up with cartridges before starting for the day. In the front of the box is a slit cut, large enough to put the hand in and out easily; the slit is covered by an accurately fitting lid, that opens *inwards*, and which, on taking your hand out, falls to of its own accord. The whole thing is something like a London front-door letter-box, only on a larger scale as regards the slit, and enables you to take a cartridge out in a second, without wetting any of the others, and as easily and quickly as from a bag or pocket. Of course, for a chase after cripples on the mud, you are forced to put some in your pocket, but then there is the ramrod all handy on your gun should you get a bad stick from a cartridge after a shot.

As regards cheap small-bore guns, my curiosity having been excited by the various conflicting accounts given of Messrs. Bland's "keeper's gun," in the *Field*, I came to the conclusion that I would like to try one of these guns, and I accordingly got a full-chambered, full-choked, "cripple-stopper" 12-bore, made on purpose for me by Messrs. Bland. The gun is remarkably neatly turned out—the locks might be better certainly; but, as a whole, I think it a wonderful value for the price, as the gun drives very hard, and is most handy. Being so cheap, I think such guns are just the thing to knock about with in boats or punts, as highly-finished and costly guns are so soon spoilt by sea water and rough usage. As far as I am concerned,

I am, so far, perfectly satisfied with the gun. I have used it with even 50grs. of the new Schultze powder and  $1\frac{1}{2}$  oz. of shot.

As regards my double 8- and single 4-bores, they are all now fitted with heel pads, and trigger and trigger-guard pads, and I am immensely pleased with them and their pads. Even without a glove on the right hand, the ringing of even the 4-bores (the latter with 3oz. of shot) is absolutely *nil*, and the heel pads most effectively protect the shoulder. I recommend firers of heavy loads to get their guns thus fitted. The cut below shows the pads on trigger and trigger-guard.



Wildfowler's hammerless Tolley 4-bore gun, fitted with Messrs. Silver's indiarubber trigger and trigger-guard pads.

Then "Titus" gave us his views :—

Among the various dodges and hints on wildfowl shooting mentioned by "Wildfowler," "Cigarette," and others, there is one which I do not recollect having noticed, viz., having the rib of the gun shaded. I have tried it on my shoulder gun for flight shooting, with much satisfaction. It is surprising what a clear black line it shows down the barrels when pointed towards the light, even on a fairly dark night.

"Wildfowler" complains of his cases getting wet. Has he ever tried the brass ones made on Sturtevant's patent—an American idea, I believe? They are the best for re-capping I have seen. I brought a few with me from New York, but find they do not fit the chamber of my gun properly—in fact, they will bear one roll of tissue paper round them. The shooting shows a decided falling off, as compared with that when the ordinary paper cases are used, which I attribute to the much greater escape of gas. I will forward some for inspection, if you like.

To this I replied that "'Titus's' plan of shading the rib was good, and would he kindly send one or two of Sturtevant's cases for inspection?" "Titus" at once, most cordially, sent four or five cases, with the following note :—

Agreeably with "Wildfowler's" request, I forward some of Sturtevant's patent brass c.f. cases, or "shells," as they are called. I should like him to give them a fair trial, and report the results. Unfortunately, as already mentioned, they do not fit the chamber of my gun properly—in fact, they will bear one roll of ordinary foreign letter paper round them without fitting tightly and I have forwarded one which I used some five months ago, and which even now distinctly shows the marks of the gas on it, thinking it might throw some light on the question of the escape of gas. I think, further, it bears on the question of guns bursting; for it seems to me that, if this thin brass case—about twice the thickness of a sheet of ordinary brown paper—will stand a charge of 4drs. powder and 2oz. shot without apparent injury, although it cannot have received the support of the sides of the chamber, owing to it fitting so loosely (and as it still does), a proved gun barrel should stand a much larger charge uninjured, unless there was an obstruction of some kind to check the freedom of the explosion and passage of the charge up the barrel. Query, to what extent does the shortness of the "villanous chasm" of a cone produce this check, and test the quality of inferior barrels.

As concerns the brass cases, although they do not fit, there is no doubt that they expand during the firing, and contract again.

The modern wildfowl shooter should carry his cripple cartridges in a belt, and he should wear a short jacket, with very large pockets—in fact, the two pockets should go all round the coat almost, and, if outside, have no flaps. The reason for this is, that, when a man has to pick up birds and use his gun as well, he finds himself in a plight if he has no receptacle handy wherein to put his spoils as soon as he collects them. Firing at a cripple, for instance, whilst holding a fowl or two in one's left hand, is most uncertain work, as the dangling of the birds, and their weight, affect the delivery of the shot. Therefore, as soon as a bird is picked up, he should be "chucked" into a wide pocket, and be done with. As regards the cartridge belt, it has the double advantage of keeping the cartridges both dry and handy, which would not be the case were they kept in one's pockets, tumbling about with one's wet or bloody spoils.

Why I advocate pockets without flaps is because flaps are always in the way when one is in a hurry; and, moreover, although theoretically they are intended to keep the wet out of pockets in case of rain or of snow, as a matter of fact they act as gutters in both cases, and certainly one gets more

wet from these very flaps than from the pockets themselves. It should, however, be borne in mind that all pockets intended to receive birds should be made waterproof *inside*, otherwise the ooze, salt water, and blood will readily percolate through any ordinary material, and, when the punter will again have to lie down in his craft, he will be apt to feel uncomfortable very soon. A piece of oilcloth, sewn inside the pockets like a bag, answers the purpose most admirably. When the coat is not in use and at home, these pockets should be turned inside out, washed clean, and allowed to dry, otherwise they get full of mud, congelated blood, and feathers, and are then anything but pleasant to use.

To this S. S. G. remarked :

I hope "Wildfowler" will forgive me, but I consider a belt of cartridges an awkward companion in case of a capsizing. A waterproof cartridge bag in the bottom of the punt is, in my opinion, preferable ; besides the cartridge belt would, I should think, be very uncomfortable when the punter was laid at his gun.

And I replied :

I disagree with S. S. G. as to a bag being preferable to a belt. In case of a capsizing the belt can be loosened in a second, whereas a bag would be entangled in the arms. I do not find, moreover, my belt uncomfortable when lying to the big gun, whereas a bag would always be in the way if kept always ready for service on one's shoulder.

But S. S. G. explained :

The cartridge bag mentioned in my letter of the 5th should not be worn under any circumstances by the punter when in his boat, but placed in the bottom of punt. A few cartridges for immediate use should be kept in the trousers pocket ; all then will be kept perfectly dry, which would not be the case with a belt. I admit that cartridges are not so easily extracted from the trousers as the coat pocket ; but, with oilskin overalls, it is decidedly the drier of the two.

And another correspondent suggested the following :

I ask pardon for again trespassing in your columns ; but I desire to suggest to "Wildfowler"—to whom I am grateful for the many wrinkles which I gather from his writings—that if the lappets to pockets are made not to overlap their ends, that he would scarcely be aware of their existence when inside, and find them most effective when pulled out in keeping all driving sleet, snow, or rain in its proper place. I usually wear a loose light linen slop overall, which seals all apertures against slight unpleasantness, and keeps one clean and dry, especially in a frost, and enables you to appear in the same colour as your boat.

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## CHAPTER XXIX.

### SHOULDER GUNS—(*Continued.*)

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Soon after the question of sticking cartridge cases had been raised by me, Messrs. Rigby, of 72, St. James-street, sent me a sample of cartridge cases which will obviate to a great extent the inconvenience I had pointed out to which wildfowl shooters are subject when their cartridges, getting wet, bulge out, and will neither go in, nor come out of, the chambers of their guns. These cases, which are 12-bores, are lined outwardly with a thin brass sheet up to nearly six-eighths of an inch of their tops, which is certainly a very great improvement; but I would suggest their being lined thus up to the very line of turning down, when, of course, it would be impossible that the paper material should ever be affected by sea water or rain, and so at all times and in all weathers the cases would readily go in or come out of the gun. Still, Messrs. Rigby deserve every praise for their promptitude in supplying this want. I am told that these cases will stand reloading several times. They certainly look very substantial and strong. Messrs. Rigby also inform me that they are now carrying on experiments with a view to rendering ordinary paper cases thoroughly waterproof, and will let me know how they get on in their undertaking. Should they succeed, of course the whole of the cases, upper parts and all, could be waterproofed with the same composition. This would prove a great boon to the shooting community.

Wildfowling guns are now on their ordeal. Punt guns, big shoulder guns, and cripple guns are thoroughly discussed, commented upon, and tried in every possible way, and the eventual results cannot fail to be highly satisfactory to that numerous body of sportsmen who make of wildfowl shooting their almost exclusive winter sport. When every other sport is well-nigh impracticable wildfowling gets in its prime, and no matter when, or where, there is always for an experienced man something to be done in that line. I hear that several firms of gunmakers are devoting a great deal of attention to the subject of wildfowl guns, and no doubt breechloading punt guns will, for the future, completely supersede muzzle-loaders. About 4-bores, Messrs. Holland have tried one of their guns in the presence of the editor of *The Field*, and I have reason to believe that the results were most satisfactory. At 100 yards, with B shot, the gun got a registered force of 200 average (a good 12 at 40 yards, with No. 6 shot, registers 160 to 170), and the gun always placed either two or three B shots on the centre plate of the apparatus, which plate is only 10in. square. At 80 yards the registered force was 168 with No. 3 shot.

Now, my first 4-bore, which was made for me by Messrs. Tolley, of Birmingham, when coming back to hand (I had sent it to have a Silver heel-pad put on, see cut below), the makers wrote to me that they had tried the gun on brown paper pads at 60 and 80 yards with No. 1 shot, using black powder and Schultze powder, with the following results, viz. : The pattern, at 60 yards, with black powder, was close enough to fire at a single bird ; but with the Schultze it was *quite as close* at 80



Messrs. Silver's Heel-pad.

yards, and the penetration averaged 36 in one case, and 28 in the other. I must state that the Schultze powder used was

of last year's make. Now, the new granulated powder, being so much stronger, would give still better results, and at a single bird, up to 100 yards, with B shot, I would not hesitate to fire, and if I did not tumble it over I would blame my luck, not the gun or the ammunition.

The following is the record of the performance of a new 4-bore gun, which record puts that of my own gun quite in the shade.

Single 4-bore flock gun, J. and W. Tolley, makers, weight 16lb., price 16*l.* ; charge, 140 grs. Schultze powder, and .8oz. shot :

PATTERN.					
	60 yards.		80 yards.		100 yards.
No. 1 shot .....	94	.....	46	.....	27
No. 2 „ .....	161	.....	75	.....	37
PENETRATION.					
No. 1 „ .....	35	.....	20	.....	17
No. 2 „ .....	22	.....	20	.....	14

There were seven pellets in the centre pad—11 inches by 10 at 100 yards—with both sizes of shot.

Messrs. Holland have also shown me one of their 4-bores with nickel-plated furniture ; and I intend trying such guns shortly at the target and on birds. Of course indiarubber heel plates are now regularly affixed to these guns, and that is as it should be. I would suggest, however, one more improvement, and that is (as shown at page 336) to pad with a strip of indiarubber that part of the trigger guard which touches the second finger of the right hand. When the gun is fired, it will be found in cold weather that the ringing of guns which carry such loads really hurts that finger. The heel-pad eases the recoil to the shoulder, but a good deal of the kicking of the gun is felt, and in fact, to some extent borne by the finger. Indeed, I have had mine peeled, or black-and-blued over and over again, when I fired even in open weather without gloves ; and in hard weather, in spite of the glove, the bruising sensation is anything but pleasant. The back of all trigger-guards, therefore, should be padded.

Respecting cripple guns, Mr. Hugh A. Silver, of 67, Cornhill, has shown me a breech-loader which, by means of two



peculiar cases, can be loaded and fired exactly like a muzzle-loader. This would come handy to a man shooting abroad, or anywhere where a supply of ordinary cases could not be secured; but muzzle-loaders are, as I have shown, to be avoided for all boat work, whenever possible.

Respecting the letters about guns being damaged by the Schultze, I find, from an editorial note, that the loads in one of the guns were 40grs. of the last issue and 1½oz. of shot. Now, in my "cripple" gun I fire 50grs. of that same powder and 1½oz. of shot: and I never in my life have had anything to come up to the range and penetration I now obtain, and my two long-chambered guns, one by Reilly and the other by Bland, are in perfect order. I have now for some years used the Schultze, and mean to stick to it. "Speak of a powder as you find it" is my motto, and I hereby give it my meed of praise, viz., so far I know nothing better.

I must, however, mention that I have received a most solemn warning from an eminent gunmaker not to resort to the Schultze for big guns; and I observe that "Punter" also distrusts the Schultze for such a purpose. But he ("Punter") only alludes to firing it in punt guns. The gunmaker I refer to, however, objects to its being used even in 8-bores, and I think I cannot do better than give his own words, withholding, of course, his name. He says:

We would urge you not to use Schultze in 8-bore cartridges, unless you wish to save the wildfowl, and on the other hand injure yourself, *the "wild-fowler."* We mean that Schultze may be safe and pleasant to use in small charges (almost useless for average range at waterfowl), but it would be very unsafe in full charges, as we load 8½in. and 4in. 8-bore cases. Nothing but coarse grain, best quality of powder, Curtis and Harvey's, or Pigou, Wilks, and Laurence's, should be trusted in charges of 8drs., with 2oz. to 2½oz. of shot, which one requires in those cartridges. Pray do not reject this advice. Should you go on with the Schultze at the present condition of the stuff, you may have cause of grief.

Now the writer of this is a practical sportsman (as well as an eminent gunmaker), whose opinions are entitled to serious consideration, and this is most earnest advice on his part. I am deeply grateful for the interest he evinces in my welfare, but the thing is—are his fears in this case well grounded?

Of course, I have no means of ascertaining. I have tried the Schultze several times even in small punt guns, and can only say that it appeared to me to drive with wonderful strength, but how near I may have been to bursting the guns I, of course, cannot tell, if the bursting was, as a matter of fact, as imminent as my most esteemed correspondent would appear to think. Now, has anyone else ever tried the Schultze in big guns? And if so, would these sportsmen kindly give their experience, for it is only by comparing practical notes that we can arrive at a satisfactory solution. I have a dread of inducing anyone to run into danger, and, should an accident occur, I would a thousand times rather it occurred to me than to anyone else through my advice; therefore, taking into consideration the various opinions lately expressed, and having some idea of my own concerning the quick ignition of the new issue, I would advise punters not to use the Schultze exclusively for punt guns, but to mix it with coarse-grained L.G. (large grain) or T.S. (treble strong), punt gunpowders in proportions of one to two, when I have reason to believe that the result would be very satisfactory; but really, until regular trials at targets are instituted, I think punt-gun shooting will remain in the dark to some extent. Could not such trials be instituted? They would prove of immense interest.

Howbeit, I think that the new Schultze used alone is so quick of ignition and so strong, that virtually it is as undesirable for punt guns as the smaller grained ordinary black powders. I would not go the length of saying that it would be positively dangerous to use it—I have used it myself several times—but in such matters it is always much better to remain on the safe side. There are punt guns, and punt guns. A modern gun of the best make will stand anything, but one on the old style might give way, and the consequences would be disastrous. *Ergo*, for punt guns, large charges, a mixture should be resorted to, of Schultze and coarse-grained black, or of medium black and coarse black.

As regards, however, 8-bores and 4-bores, I think, from experience, that the fears expressed are groundless, and though

grateful for the interest and attention shown me, I persist in my views, and will use no other powder but the Schultze, which has hitherto pleased me immensely—both with those guns and with smaller-bored guns, at any rate—whatever may be my opinions respecting its use in punt guns. .

As regards accidents, they will occur with any guns and with any powders; and to blame the one or the other without absolute proofs as to which is at fault—the shooter, the gun, or the powder, or the way of loading—is unreliable. For instance, wads shifting may cause a gun to burst. To prevent that sort of thing, I would recommend shooters who use reloaded cases to remove the left case into the right chamber whenever only the right barrel has been fired. By this means the cartridges will always be about right. But fresh cartridges, if of good quality, do not require such precautions, as the top wad, practically, does not move, except in very large-bore guns. Then, of course, the larger the bore the more power has the shot against the wad, and its jumping will bulge the top wad with time and firing, and probably dislodge it, with results which may prove dangerous—perhaps not actually when the shot is fired, but the gun is thereby strained, and might give way afterwards, when perhaps a much smaller load than usual was being used.

The correspondence on the point excited a great deal of interest amongst sportsmen, and the following letter was sent to *The Field*:—

I lately got a single 8-bore cylinder, 12lb. weight, to take the 4in. cartridge. I tried it first with ordinary black powder, and then with Schultze, and found the recoil from the latter, using the same measure of each, to be much less than with the black. I began with 99grs., equal to 7drs. by measure, and 2½oz. of shot, and went on to 106grs., equal to 7½drs. and 3oz. shot, and did not find any inconvenience in the recoil; but when I fired 118grs. the recoil was unpleasant. After firing sixty or seventy shots, some at birds and some at a target, I found that the action had become stiff, and, not divining the cause, fired three or four more shots. In cleaning the gun afterwards I found that the soldering along one side of the lump underneath had given way, and was slightly open, and the barrel did not fit the false breech as before. The maker, to whom I returned it, says the barrel is done for, the chamber having given way. The cartridge I blamed for causing the damage contained 106grs. Schultze, two thick wads, 2½oz. BB, and one cloth wad, and, I believe, in wadding

it, the wad alipped down rather heavily on to the powder, and compressed it more than was prudent.

I tried the same gun with 7drs. of Col. Hawker's powder, and the result was a decided improvement in the pattern, without any apparent diminution of force. My target being only an iron plate, I could not actually test the penetration; but when I get my new barrel, which is to be a choke, I mean to try it at brown paper.

W. P. G.

To this letter I replied: The charge of 3oz. of shot in an 8-bore was simply excessive; 2½oz. is the utmost load that should be resorted to. No wonder that it strained the action and "did" for the barrel, but to blame the Schultze for it appears to me unreliable, as any powder, having to propel such a load of shot out of an 8-bore barrel, would have done the same.

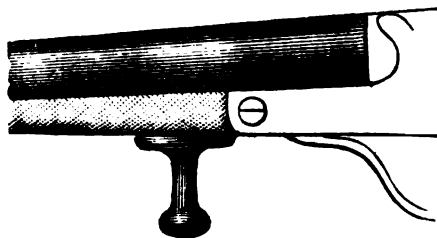
It would have been satisfactory to have had the gun examined, and see if the metal of the body was at all to blame in the matter. As I use the Schultze exclusively, I am rather interested in the case. My single 4-bores and my double 8-bores are all but one with back-action locks, so that the break-off is not, in any way, interfered with—a great source of accidents this, when it is done, as it must be for all bar-lock guns. I never have had a downright accident yet, though once I "sprang" slightly a 4-bore gun; but the action was not a strong one, so the gun then was to blame, to my knowledge; and in the times of black powders, I have "sprung" several guns, too, in the same manner. Many things tend to produce that effect, especially in heavy wildfowl guns, which, at all times, have to carry terrific charges. Hence none but the very best of materials should be used for such guns.

As regards guns bursting, and their being prevented from doing mischief to the shooter, a device of mine is being acted upon by Mr. Silver, and will shortly be submitted to the public in a practical form. In view of the many accidents which constantly happen with firearms, through many causes, it has occurred to me that some device protecting the shooter's left hand (the most exposed and usually disabled part), would be desirable, and my plan consists in screwing in a handy position under the barrels, a handle whereby to hold the gun as usual with the left hand, but the top of the handle—just

where it touches the fore end (or break-off, if it is fixed on the break-off)—is provided with a flat steel plate, just wide enough to cover the hand when it grasps the handle. Now, by this means two ends are attained. First—everyone who walks with a gun on the “ready,” experiences a feeling of fatigue in the left arm, because when actually grasping the barrels with the left hand, the muscles are in a false position. Let anyone turn up the palm of his left hand, and he will at once experience that unpleasant sensation in the muscles of the fore arm; now this unpleasant sensation is greatly intensified when a weight has to be carried for any length of time in that position, whereas if the hand is held out as though grasping the neck of a bottle standing on a table for instance, no unpleasant sensation is felt, and the grip can be retained without fatigue for a much longer time. Well, my handle, screwed for use, would be just that way beneficial, and, secondly, in case a barrel bursts, the left hand would be safely protected—an end to be devoutly wished for.

To fix this handle soundly, a lump of steel will be forged on the barrels, underneath, close to the hinge, and in this lump the male screw of the handle will be screwed, or unscrewed, at will—but of all this, more anon. I may, however, add that, in my estimation, the aiming will also be greatly improved by using such a handle, as the left hand will be normally used, instead of the muscles being distorted as they are now, when the barrels are held in the usual manner.

The subjoined cut shows my plan :



Wildfowler's Safety Handle.

I am not aware that such a device has ever been resorted to, for handiness and protection; but it is, nevertheless, possible

that it may have been. When, however, I mentioned it in the columns of *The Field*, no one offered any remark on the subject, and therefore, practically, I believe the utility of the improvement is admitted on all hands. I intend giving the plan a thorough trial myself, and will report thereon at some future time.

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## CHAPTER XXX.

### FLAPPER SHOOTING.

---

THE very type of the shooting sportsman is the bog-trotter. He must have all the skill of the best game shot, the patience of a camel, the determination and perseverance of an ant, the constitution of a polar bear, the ways and tastes of a crocodile (being fond of being in and out of water) : he must, moreover, be sure-footed, quick-witted, and as full of "wrinkles" as the proverbial egg is full of meat, and his stamina must be as undeniable as that of a thoroughbred.

"Never say die," and "whilst there is life there is hope," must be his mottoes ; and to these he must act to the very letter, for, his pursuit is one which is full of dangers—but very fascinating, precisely on that account.

The first thing a bog-trotter must do, who undertakes to shoot over a new marsh, is to ascertain the topography of the ground he has to shoot over, thoroughly well. And, in order to do this, he must not trust to verbal or written information. He must go himself, repeatedly, and in all directions, across the bog or marsh until he feels as well at home in it as he would in his own drawing-room, *i.e.*, he must know all its weak points, soft spots, dangerous crossings, &c. Generally, a little doctoring will be found, not only useful, but absolutely necessary. A few wide planks, with some strips of lath nailed across, being judiciously placed wherever a safe passage is problematical, will render the sport more attractive, since they will ensure to the shooter a perfect mastery over his ground. Moreover, in all likely spots, ambushes should be

prepared; and in the very midst of the bog, if it is far away from any village, a low hut, covered over with turf, should be prepared. The shooter would find this shelter very handy during stormy weather, or during a fog, or when he has to wait at night for birds.

None but men thoroughly sound in their constitutions should take to marsh shooting; and even when a man is gifted with strength, good lungs, and good health, he should indulge in the sport with moderation, and take every precaution which modern knowledge can suggest, in order to counteract the evil effects of this most trying pursuit.

Strange as it may seem, however, the winter season is less trying to the bog-trotter than is his sport at the end of summer, the beginning of autumn, and the end of spring, because in winter time the cold weather renders the earth less porous. Hence there are fewer deleterious exhalations; and, as generally, there is then a strong wind blowing, these are blown away quickly, and thus do not affect the sportsman or his dog. But in summer time, especially after a wet season, when a broiling sun is slowly baking the land, and not a breath of air is stirring, the shooter and his four-footed companion are moving in a decidedly unhealthy atmosphere.

Indeed, at such times, I, who am writing this, when shooting over some low lands, have felt almost suffocated, and several times have had to give up the sport for half an hour's rest on higher ground. As for the dogs, so pernicious is that influence of marshy work on their constitution, that it is very rare indeed for a dog, no matter what his breed may be, to stand that work for more than four or five seasons regularly. I mean, of course, when he is at it almost every day during the wildfowl season.

This very early decay is attributable to three causes. Firstly, very hard work—marsh shooting being a most arduous sort of work for either dog or man. Secondly, rheumatism—the dog being constantly in and out water. Thirdly, the effects of the poisonous gases which, being disengaged from the mud, where they were confined, by the dog's feet as he tramps over the soft ground, poisons the air which he



breathes. Now and then, this action of these gases is so strong, particularly on those hot July and August days when snipe and flappers are sought in the marshes, that not unfrequently the dogs lose almost entirely their power of scent. I have often seen dogs thus utterly lost for a time being, as regarded nose. In such a case, the only remedy is to have the dog sent home, and use another one; or, if only one dog is owned by the shooter, he should take him to some high and dry land until he has recovered. I am, of course, here speaking only of those setting dogs or spaniels which are used for marsh shooting. As regards retrievers proper, no such precautions are necessary, or indeed needed, because the dogs do not inhale nearly so many obnoxious gases, since they have only to use their noses for work when a bird has to be picked up; whereas setting dogs and spaniels are constantly at work scenting hither and thither throughout the day.

Talking about dogs, in my humble opinion it is a pure matter of fancy and of ground as to the choice of a dog for bog-trotting. I have used all kinds—pointers, setters, and spaniels—and I always got on very well with either. If a lot of thick reeds have to be beaten, a quick-bustling spaniel, or even two, working well under the gun, will be very handy. But if the covert is short, then I should certainly advocate a good setter, or even a pointer, if the latter does not mind water. I have had several pointers which would have put to shame any water-spaniel both for working and for retrieving from land or from water.

The chief birds sought after by the bog-trotter are snipe and the various kinds of ducks. Now, at the beginning of the season (however different it will be found afterwards) the pursuit of both ducks and snipe can be carried out with perfect success, as the two sports do not interfere with each other. Now this will seem rather strange to the uninitiated, but it is nevertheless a fact that flappers at the beginning of the season are not at all disturbed by any shots which may be fired at some distance from them. As an instance in point, a friend of mine, Alfred B., was very much surprised at a strong evidence of that characteristic of flappers. We

were in a boat doing a creek with our guns, when we saw a flock of some two hundred flappers settling in the marsh. We landed, and I actually fired a 4-bore twice at passing birds, within four hundred yards of the flock, and the birds squatted and never moved, until actually put up by some curlews which disturbed them.

To resume now about bog-trotting. When I have the opportunity of shooting at the beginning of the season in a marsh which holds both snipe and flappers, as a matter of course I invariably go in first for the snipe, knowing full well that the flappers in the distance will squat all the closer for every shot which is fired away from them; whereas, if I began by trying to get at the flappers, I should certainly disturb a good many of the snipe within hearing.

By the way, there is an impression among a certain class of anti-game law agitators—or, rather, they pretend to have such an impression—that flappers are shot on the water before they are able to fly. Now, broadly speaking, there never was a greater fallacy or untruth—according to the way in which one likes to look at it—than the expression of such an opinion. Sportsmen do not kill for killing sake, and if a sportsman were told to kill a bird that was unable to fly, as it skimmed over the water, he would simply scorn the very idea. That some schoolboys or one-day sportsmen have now and then killed flappers which were unable to rise, is likely enough; but that the whole body of marsh shooters—than whom no better or truer sportsmen exist—should be systematically accused of such unsportsman-like behaviour, shows a rather disreputable state of things among their opponents. Now, for the latter's information, it should be emphatically stated that, because a sportsman has some flappers in his marsh, he is not obliged to kill them before they can fly; and, in fact, he is not such a simpleton as to do so, since it would spoil the sport which those very birds at some future and not far-distant day would show him when they were full-fledged. Broadly speaking, then, when a sportsman comes across an unfledged brood of flappers, he passes on and calls his dog away. A few days later, that

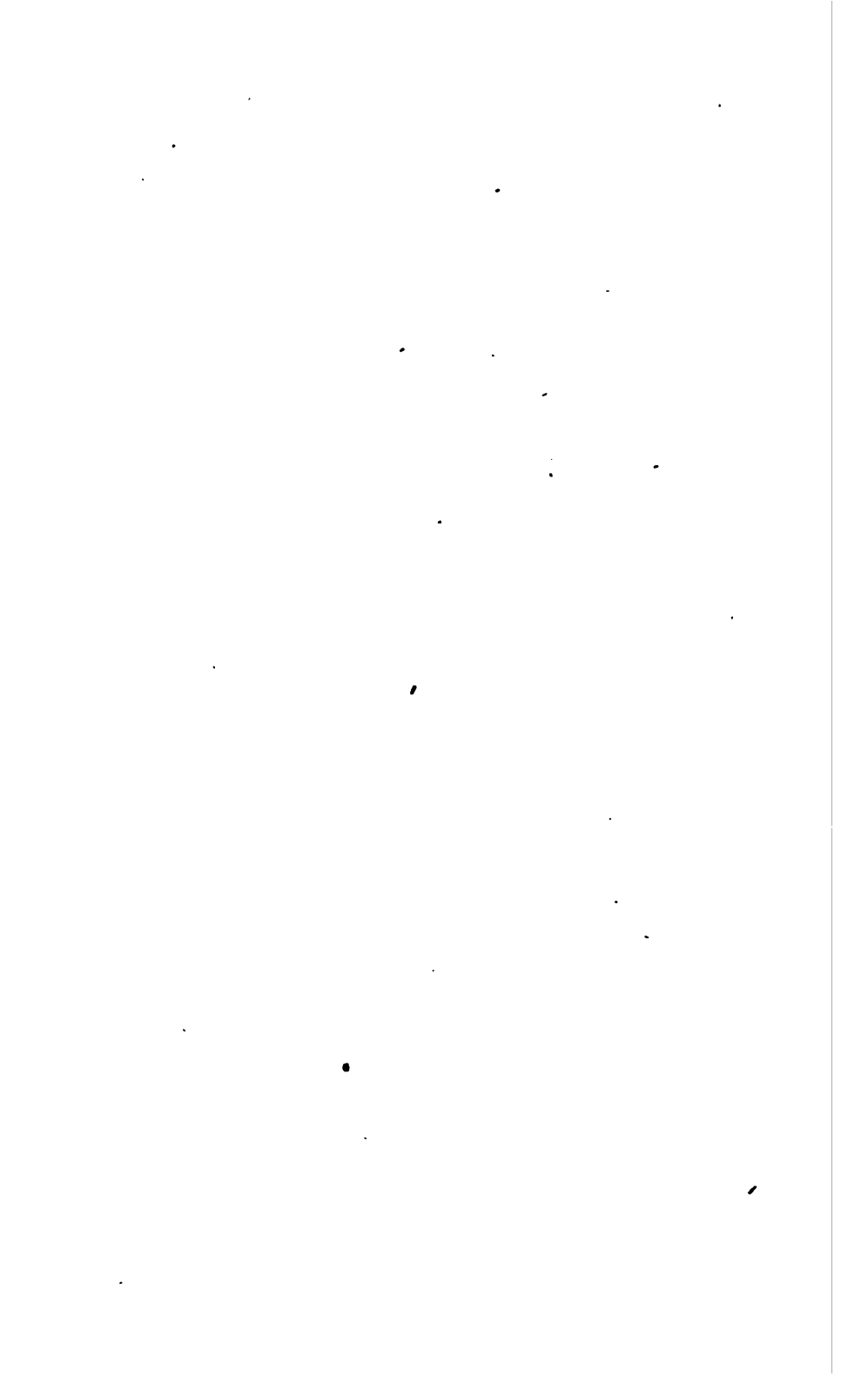
very same brood will rise quick enough, and then each of its individual members will show sport.

Now, as regards full-fledged flappers, when able to take care of themselves if they chose, this is how I proceed.

To begin with, it should be remembered that for flapper shooting the same tactics should hold good which are pursued for partridge shooting. In the latter case one breaks the covey; in the former one should try to scatter the brood. But, as the nature of the ground is then vastly different, some little ingenuity should be resorted to. Thus, if the extent of water in the marsh is considerable and deep, the shooter should have a small boat handy, wherewith he and his keeper, by rowing or poling across the middle of the water or ponds (see illustration opposite, showing how the thing is done in the celebrated Abbeville Marshes), should drive gently, but surely, all the fowl on its surface to the shore. If the water is shallow and the bottom safe, the shooter, having provided himself with long boots, should stalk across it in its full length, thus producing the same effect—*i.e.*, that of driving the birds into the reeds or near the banks. When this is done, the rest is as simple as A B C. The shooter should take the wind, and set his dog to work. If a busy spaniel, he should keep well under the gun, and work right merrily. If a setting dog, he should be broken especially for that sort of work, since he need do no more quartering than the extent of covert will allow. A good dog will point a flapper with the staunchness of a pyramid, and, as a matter of taste, I rather prefer shooting flappers which get up from the point of a pointer or setter than from the bustle of a spaniel; because, with a setting dog, one sees a good deal more of the fun—when he first gets scent, when he draws, and when he points. Thus one enjoys the sport more, and one is fully warned. On the other hand, with this sort of work, the shooter has to do a good deal of paddling, many of the setting dogs objecting *in toto* to put up their birds even when told. Some few old ones, however, do so when ordered. But, if a young dog were to be worked thus, systematically, his staunchness would soon be a thing of the past. Therefore,



DUCK SHOOTING IN ABBEVILLE MARSHES.



unless the shooter has a specially broken setting dog, he must walk up to every point, at whatever inconvenience or danger, and put up his birds himself, one by one. Now, this does not occur with a properly-broken spaniel, who, as soon as he finds a bird, if he is well broken, should squint first at his master, to see if he is near enough, and then goes in "the whole hog or none." It will thus be perceived that the two styles are vastly different.

In a marsh well supplied with birds, the sport is uproarious, and I have spent some of my most jolly days in flapper-shooting. When the covert is thick, the birds dart about like frogs, and to see the eagerness of the dogs and of the shooters, in trying to circumvent the wily customers, is a bit of the most exhilarating fun. Many of the birds will not get up until almost mouthed by the dogs, and it takes some work to enable a dog to do that. I remember once a spaniel of mine jumped clean from the bank into the midst of a large brood. They darted away like the sparks from a catherine wheel, and in less than a second not one of them was to be seen. Had the old duck been with them, doubtless she would have shown them the way how to rise; but, as it turned out, they were evidently motherless, poor things! so we accordingly set to work and bagged the whole lot. As an invariable rule, when the duck is with her brood, she always watches for their safety; and, at the first signal of danger, she entices them to follow her into the supposed fastness of the reeds. If, however, by hook or by crook, you can manage to pop suddenly upon her, she will, to a certainty, rise first, and the whole lot will follow suit. Bag her, and the rest are at your mercy; for, you can almost always mark the youngsters, and, if you spare no trouble, you will eventually kill them all, one by one, dealing with them from a generalship point of view, just as you would have done in a stubble field with a covey of young partridges.

I always prefer being alone when shooting flappers. In many districts, however, it is carried on simultaneously from boats and on the shore. Where the water is extensive, both sets of shooters can enjoy themselves; but great caution should be exercised when, for instance, wounded birds are

fired at on the water ; because the shot may glance off the surface of the water, and hit some shooter in a boat or ashore. Now, the natural difficulties of bog-trotting are sufficiently great without adding a probability, however remote, of being shot by a friend. And I therefore repeat it, I would rather be alone while marsh shooting. Even when tramping, one may slip into a hole, and if the forefinger happens to touch the trigger, bang ! goes the gun, and you may kill a companion if you have one near you. The following case, bearing on the point, occurred recently. I was tramping with a friend over some saltings, when suddenly he went into a hole up to his thigh, and nearly fell on his face. Fortunately his finger was not on the trigger ; had it been so he would undoubtedly have shot me, for I was only a few yards away from him, and the muzzle of his gun was point blank facing me. Consequently, I think I am quite justified in saying that wherever one's footing may be uncertain it is best to shoot alone. This not only does away with accidents, but it gives greater confidence to the shooter, who, feeling perfectly secure from that quarter, anyhow, sets his mind entirely on the sport before him, uses his best skill, makes a good bag, and thoroughly enjoys himself.

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## CHAPTER XXXI.

### INLAND DUCK SHOOTING.

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VERY long boots, for marsh shooting, I consider a great mistake, because they tire their wearers before half the day is over, and, moreover, practically they have no *raison d'être*. A man never deliberately goes into water which reaches above his knees, because if he does so, he cannot tell within a few inches the depth of the water through which he may be wading, and he will be pretty sure to suddenly get into a hole, when he will have his long boots filled with water, thereby producing just what long boots are supposed to avoid—i.e., wet feet.

No. A man who does a deal of tramping in a marsh must be somewhat lightly shod, so as not to be “done” with his walking exertions ere he has had time to fully enjoy his day’s sport. Indeed, for a long time I have worn simply ordinary shooting boots—keeping on the move until I could change them and my socks, and thus avoiding any of the ill effects which may arise from having wet feet. But when one has to drive back a goodish while in the cool of the evening, it is best to be prepared with such feet-covering as will insure tolerably dry feet, and yet not clog the shooter with unnecessary weight. Now, these last *desiderata* the *Field* boots fulfil most admirably. The feet are kept dry, and the weight is not too considerable to prevent one from enjoying a long day’s tramp. So far, then, they are all that one can wish; but



what I find fault with is that these boots—at least, mine are so—are lined inside, all along the heels and sides, with some cloth—presumably impermeable cloth—with a view to making the concern as waterproof as possible. Now, the object in view is laudable, but the manner in which it is effected is deplorable. Any cloth lining in shooting boots is the greatest possible error into which a maker may fall. Cloth gets worn through with astonishing rapidity, to begin with; this is in favour of trade, though. Cloth, moreover, chafes the feet, and this is very riling; so that, altogether, I abominate cloth in any form inside a boot. However, yielding to the maker's assertion that the boots would prove everything that could be wished, I invested in a pair of *Field* boots, with the result that, after a day's tramp, I was invariably crippled, which is unsatisfactory; and also that, after my first two days' shooting, the lining of the boots was worn through, which is also unsatisfactory. Of the rest I can speak most highly; my feet were dry, and I was not in the least impeded by the weight of the boots. But the best knee-boots I have ever worn, are, incomparably, *The Clarence*, made by Messrs. Fagg, of 29, Haymarket. They are simply perfection—light and watertight as a bottle.

As regards the best way of keeping shooting boots in perfect working condition, opinions vary very much. A great sportsman advocated once the use of butter, arguing that such stuff is always comeatable wherever one goes, so that the trouble of carrying the messing tin box full of ordinary dubbing would be thus avoided. He stated that the butter should be applied on the leather after it has been previously warmed by the fire, and it should be well rubbed into the leather. I have never had my *Field* boots treated in that way, but will give the plan a trial shortly. It is certainly worth anyone's while to do so, as there are but few things more conducive to comfort than the fact of having one's feet perfectly dry and cosy throughout a long tramp in a marsh. Messrs. Fagg's *Clarence* boots, by the way, require no dressing—a great advantage this.

The ways of ducks in a marsh are very peculiar. They are either very wild, and thoroughly alive to the slightest show of

danger, or very tame—being hungry, and so absorbed in the pleasurable occupation of feeding as not to notice any but very loud noises—and even then I have often found the report of a gun fail to put them up. I mean even old birds; as for flappers they almost invariably squat on hearing gun shots. I have seen flocks of hundreds of flappers on bare flats squatting unanimously when I, in the distance, and not very far off either, say 400 yards, was firing at something else—sometimes with my 4-bore guns, too, whose explosions are sufficiently loud to give a fair warning of a gunner's approach.

Now, in Belgium, the *marais*, as they are called, consist of a zone of flat lands, very much intercepted by ditches, canals, and brooks, thus making the land look pretty much like a chess-board. Some of the meadows are almost wholly flooded, and others are so low that they are in a state of chronic softness. These are the favourite haunts of snipe in Belgium. The ducks, teal, &c., keep in the brooks and ditches. Lapwings are higher up in the ploughed fields; but occasionally they also visit the marsh for their daily ablutions, &c., and curlews, *et hoc genus omne*, fly hither and thither, and are not at all particular as to where they settle. I have often shot them on the points of my setters and pointers there. Last autumn—by the way—on a shooting of mine in Essex, I was shooting over a brace of setters, when they pointed through a hedge, and, on looking over, I found it was a curlew. He did not give me a fair chance, though, and I missed him. Now, it is somewhat rare here to have such points; but in Belgium the covert in the marshes is so good, that the birds, unless particularly on the alert, or in flocks, when one of them is sure to detect you and give the alarm—will allow dogs to point them quite readily.

Now, of course, it must be very startling indeed for any bird to find himself suddenly thus being pointed, but curlews, being by nature among the shyest, are excessively ludicrous under such circumstances. The way in which a curlew starts when he is thus ruthlessly put up is quite amusing. He never fails to call out, and one could almost put words to the music of his calls. Up he gets, opens his beak, turns his head

towards you, and spins away, yelling, "Now, then, what's the good of giving me such a start?" They are very funny birds, and I should say that in captivity they ought to prove very interesting. I have seen several pinioned curlews in parks, and they were noted as being most intelligent and amusing. I certainly give them credit for both, in their wild state.

Howbeit, although clever and amusing, they are, like most of us, the "children of fate" and the "victims of circumstances." Now, on the Belgian coast (which they are mighty fond of patronising, for the simple reason that very few people trouble them there), there is a belt of downs which fringes the sea shore, and, as regular as clockwork, as soon as the tide is on the turn, the curlews leave the marsh lands and resort to the sands, for the purpose of feeding on those sea lugs and other food which the receding tide will leave behind, exposed on the sands or in the shallow pools. The shooters, therefore, have only to ascertain at what time the tide will begin to recede, and, if they wish to make a bag of curlews and shore birds, they can very easily do so, as they have but to hide in the downs, watch for the birds, and stalk them very deliberately, under the shelter of the sandy hillocks.

*Pour revenir à nos canards*, I call sport in the Belgian fens the very *acme* of fun. The brooks, ditches, ponds, &c., are too small for flocks, hence only trips, or even single birds, or pairs are put up, so that, as I stated before, one has only to go on ahead to repeatedly put up birds; whereas, if one should have to deal with a large flock on a large pond, at the first shot they would all be off, and the sport would be at an end. In Belgium, the fun can be carried on all day, and day after day throughout the season; and, I repeat it, all kinds of wild-fowl, besides partridges, quails, and hares, are to be met with; therefore I think I am justified in saying that the sport is truly grand.

But the shooter's exertions have to be great; hence I am afraid sybaritic shooters who require a stool to sit on, a carpet under their feet, and a wine-bearer, would vote the thing exceedingly slow; for, every hundred yards or so a ditch has to be jumped. Generally this is done with a leaping pole, which

the keeper carries along with him, and without which it would be perfectly impossible to sport. But I found that, when this jumping-pole business had to be done, my gun was always in the way, as it had no sling; so that I had to pitch it over to my companions or to the keeper before going over myself. Therefore, anyone intending to indulge in that sort of shooting should have his gun rigged up with a sling, so as to be able to sling it on his back, and thus have both hands free for jumping with the pole.

In the Belgian marshes, as well as in Essex and in some of the Lincolnshire fens, the birds are found singly, and pretty easily disposed of. In woodlands, in daytime, ducks are very fond of such ponds there as may afford them some security, but they leave them at dusk, and repair then to open marshes and rivers, where they feed all night; and at early dawn they leave these for the open sea if they are much persecuted, or for the brooks by the seashore if the neighbourhood is very quiet—*i.e.*, if only cattle are feeding. Ducks do not stand men being much near their haunts. If flappers have by chance been hatched near a field where labourers come to plough or do some other work, the old duck will take care to keep them well hidden until such time as they can waddle well, when, in the dusk of some fine evening, she will entice them away to some more congenial spot.

The attachment of the duck for her flappers is very wonderful. She, like the hen partridge, will rise and flutter before a dog to entice him away, if he comes near her brood, &c., and once they have been disturbed, she will take care that the event shall not be twice repeated in the same place; so that, if a brood has been bothered once, it is almost useless to look for them again at the same spot, unless they are so small as to be totally unable to follow the duck's enticements to leave the place for good.

This propensity of the duck to lead away her young is so well known that, at Abbeville, where I shot some ten years ago, the usual dodge, wherever a brood was known to be, was to wait very silently in ambush in a boat for the duck to come out, swimming, from her fastness, when a shot laid her flat.

This done, the brood was at the shooter's mercy, since the ducklings had no guide and would not dare to leave the place. Hence the men, who generally shot for the market, used to bide their time, and at dusk they brought a tame duck to the shore, tied her by the leg to a stake, hid themselves, and awaited the result.

The duck (whose leg, by the way, has to be covered with leather so as to prevent its being chafed by the string which holds her fast) no sooner finds herself alone, than she begins quacking for *her* young ones. The wild brood hearing her, mistake her for their parent, and forthwith set out, swimming towards the calls. I have seen this many times, and a very pretty sight it is when the golden sunset is reflected on the water, to see this little battalion of youngsters vigorously paddling, to the best of their abilities, in order to rejoin the aforesaid supposed-to-be long-lost mother. Now, if the ducklings are too young to kill, the shooter lets them alone, but he carefully notes their condition, and mentally makes a note of the future and not very distant day at which he might safely reckon upon their being ready for the gun; then he probably will repeat the dodge of the duck-call if he shoots for the market, when a couple of barrels will pretty well settle the whole lot if he bides his chance, and waits until they are crowded together "all of a lump," as the saying goes. But, if he is a sportsman, he will hunt for them with his dog, and put them up, one after the other, in regular style.

Market shooters, all over the world, are a perfect pest to sportsmen. Imagine a fellow in two shots murdering twelve or more ducks, which would have given rise to no end of fun! And there is this difference between duck shooting in marshes and duck shooting at sea or in estuaries, that in the first case I think it is unpardonable in a man to even attempt to kill many birds at one shot, because there the birds can be shot singly, whereas at sea and in estuaries they are in flocks, and must be dealt with accordingly. It is either to fire then and kill a lot, or else let them alone altogether; and, considering then: 1, the many dangers of the pursuit; 2, the fact that probably only one shot is to be had at the lot; 3, that the birds will

congregate, and cannot be found otherwise, I think the artillery then used is perfectly legitimate, and the numbers killed a just reward for the pluck and skill displayed, and the only shot which will perhaps be had for twenty-four hours.

When some ducks rise out of shot, the shooter should not jump to the conclusion that it is all *up*. Very often I have, in such cases, found other ducks hidden in the reeds or under the banks, therefore the shooter should proceed carefully, and cause his dog to beat every likely place with due diligence. As for teal, they are exceedingly silly. They rise, and if not fired at they quietly go on a little way, and then drop on to the stream or ditch, and think themselves in perfect security—a great mistake on their part, as the sequel generally shows them. Ducks are not quite such idiots; but they nevertheless have some “innocents” in their ranks, and these innocents—generally youngsters—act pretty well like teal, only they go further than teal, and keep a good look-out then, which teal do not.

When a shooter has marked birds settling in a brook or ditch, he should go a wide round, describing exactly a half-circle, one end of which should be the spot where he stood when he originally perceived the birds, and the other end the very spot where he thinks he will find them. These tactics I have always employed with the greatest success. One should always avoid kicking a stone or a hurdle, or anything likely to make a noise; the dog should be taught then to keep perfectly to heel *by signs*, and the sportsman should walk very quickly, or even run, on his errand. I invariably do the latter, myself, because I have frequently noticed that if teal or ducks have thus been marked, they often get up again without any assignable cause, within a very short space of time. Hence I run on quickly, but on tiptoe; I avoid any noise, and generally I succeed in “doing” my birds.

A duck just on the rise is one of these birds, which it is impossible to kill on the one-eye-shut system. I keep both eyes open myself for all shooting, and had I ten eyes I should keep them *all* open. One cannot have too many optics. As for the one-eye shut plan, I quite agree that, for a bird which

goes right away from you, one may aim in that style, as the shot will go in the direction of the bird anyhow ; but in any other case shutting one eye is a mistake. How can one send the shot where the bird is going if one deliberately aims at the bird? The shot must then go behind or under, of course. The great secret of success in shooting precisely consists in *not* firing at what you want to kill. This sounds very much like a paradox, but it is nevertheless a fact which requires but little demonstration. Fire point blank at a bird (in any position but when he is going straight away from you), and your shot will strike where the bird *was*, but where *he no longer is*—hence a clean miss. *Ergo*, for good shooting, keep both eyes open, mentally *calculate where the bird will be* when your shot can reach *him*, fire *there*, and you will have the pleasure of seeing the bird going head over heels. Now, especially for duck shooting in marshes the both-eyes-open plan must absolutely be resorted to, because the duck rises exceedingly fast, and at the same time he is going away. Hence the mental calculation and the eyes to catch the spot as to where he will be, are both eminently requisite; and, if one eye is shut, and the bird is “followed,” its speed is so great that the shot will be feet, if not yards, behind him or under him, according to the direction in which he is flying away from the shooter.

Now, to conclude. In hard weather the duck tribe are rather fond of hiding in running streams—the only places, presumably, where they can find any food. Then they will require a careful hunt. I have frequently bolted some from under the roots of willow trees, &c.; and, when disturbed then, one is apt at first, from their slow paddling, to imagine that they are only moorhens. When flushed by a dog, a duck always “speaks;” but, if it rises behind your back, on the sly, you will only hear the splash of its wings. It will not “open” then, but steal away if it can. In shallow water it will jump up a yard in the air in its first spring, because its paddles then feel the ground, but in a deep river he splashes on rising. Thus, anyhow, if within range, and the air is still, one has a tolerably fair warning of a duck’s attempted exit;

but, if a breeze is blowing, the noise is so slight as to be unnoticeable. And thus it often occurs that a duck would steal away unperceived, were it not that the shooter detects it from the corner of his eyes as it flies up from its haunt. In reeds and tall grass, however, a duck makes a great row on rising—quite as much as a pheasant; hence beginners are generally quite as much startled by the one as they would be by the other, and many ducks are missed which should not be, even by practised hands.

The best shot for ducks in marshes is No. 5 in first barrel and No. 3 in the second. The latter shot, in a full-choked gun, has a tremendous penetration; and, if a pellet or two hit in the wings or a vital part, up to untold distances, it will disable the bird. At least, that is my experience.

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## CHAPTER XXXII.

### SAILING TO FOWL.

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PUNTING, especially at night, must, at first sight, appear to a man who is not used to it, anything but a very inviting sport. The idea of being alone all night in a most lonely, unfrequented, weird spot in an estuary, with nothing about one but mud-banks and brine, and to hear no sound but the sighing of the wind, the murmuring of the sea, and the "calls" of fowl and shorebirds cannot be entertaining to anyone whose soul is not in the sport, and who has not been thoroughly apprenticed to the fun. All this I readily admit, although I confess that, to me, night-punting has such charms that I cannot describe its glories. Those who have enjoyed it will understand me; to others I am afraid it must be a sealed book. But that the attraction of the sport is simply irresistible, is sufficiently proved by the fact that, once a young fellow has been able to enjoy it, he never willingly throughout life forsakes it. Whether a man punts for the market or for pleasure, is all one—once he has punted, he never will give up punting, if he can help it; therefore, there must be "something in it." However, wildfowl shooting is such a very accommodating pursuit that it can be carried on in a multitude of manners—*à l'en a pour tous les goûts*; and to those sportsmen at heart who would gladly enjoy the sport in some such manner as to preclude the necessity of long-continued exertion and loneliness, I can recommend a most enticing style of carrying on the sport—and that is—to sail to fowl.

There is nothing that can be compared to sailing to fowl for both comfort, excitement, and fun. There is, of course, always some element of danger, but this only lends further enchantment to the pursuit. Let the cutter, however, be substantially built and well-found, and her crew sufficiently awake to the peculiar difficulties inherent to each fresh wild-fowl station, and there is no reason why the fun should be more dangerous than mere cruising about in a pleasure yacht.

But, whereas in mere cruising the sport must at last pall on one, when sailing to fowl one never wearies. And, in truth, is there anything more charming than being on board with a bosom friend as sport-struck as you are, sailing about in search of the flocks and companies, now shooting, now tacking, now lunching, dining, smoking, sleeping, &c.—in fact, enjoying sport to the utmost, together with well-nigh the comforts of one's home? Provided one knows how to cater, and everything that can be needed has been duly provided, I know few things more entertaining than being on board a yacht; and, when shooting is added to the fun, then the *acme* of delight, to my mind, is reached; and I think that those shooters who have not hitherto tasted the sweets of that sort of outing have in store one of those most pleasurable treats which it is always a delight hereafter to revert to.

Sailing to fowl can be carried on throughout the whole season, but more sport is to be expected when the weather is cold and a bit rough, for then one has almost all the fowl in the country congregated about the coasts and broad estuaries. During "passage" times, too, in autumn and spring, great execution can be done, but then one must have someone on the spot to give due warning of the birds having turned up; and this cannot always be done, as professionals are always very reticent on the subject, and, unless one pays them well, they rarely give notice of anything really good. Several shooters of my acquaintance, however, apply a remedy to that chronic unwillingness of professionals by taking one of these men into their pay, and thus reaping the sweets of the fun at, after all, but little cost. Others, who live near the sea, almost spend their lives at

sea during the season; and thus they reap the full benefit of both "passages," and glean, moreover, between whiles, whatever birds may choose to stop in their district.

Personally, I like a cutter-rigged boat best; but yawls are preferred by many shooters. It is a pure matter of taste, after all. As regards the tonnage, it depends entirely upon the nature of the work which the boat may be called upon to perform. If she is intended only for British coast work, I think she should not be more than ten or twelve tons. I have myself used a six-tonner for two seasons, with good success, and should not care to have a larger boat were it not that the accommodation in the six-tonner is somewhat limited. You are two, say a chum and yourself; then a man and a lad as crew. Well, you two shooters sleep in the cabin, and the crew in the forecabin. Now, in the cabin of a six-tonner there is not much room to spare, when once each bunk is occupied; in fact, it is a rather "tight fit" for anybody. Hence, whenever possible, I always like to run back to harbour and sleep at an inn ashore; but, when birds are abundant, one does not like to waste time in sailing backwards and forwards in that manner. Hence, whenever there was a likelihood of having sport early on the morrow, we always ran her up a creek, and then anchored for the night, sleeping aboard, and never minding the, after all, very slight discomforts. In a ten or twelve-tonner, however, there is a great deal more room; in fact, one can be exceedingly comfortable then, if the boat is well-built internally; and, therefore, all considered, I should award the palm to a ten or twelve-tonner for British coast work.

If, however, trips are intended to be taken to the Dutch coast, then I should rather prefer something much larger—a sixty or seventy-tonner, if come-atable, but nothing smaller than thirty or forty-tonners anyhow; for then one has to rough it there at times pretty stiffly, and a six-tonner would come to grief most indubitably.

Respecting the internal accommodation of a wildfowl-shooting yacht, the acknowledged notion is to have the usual arrangements entirely reversed—i.e., the shooters' cabin

being forward and the men's berths aft. This is all very well if a man gets his craft built to order; but I make bold to say that for one such yacht there are hundreds which are merely ordinary yachts, simply for the reason that many yachts are pressed into the wildfowl-shooting service which never were intended for it. If a sportsman desires to enjoy the sport, and looks about him for a suitable craft, he will have to buy her as she stands; and, if she is a cutter, the chances are a thousand to one that the aft-cabin will be the only one fit for the master or owner; therefore he must perforce use her as he finds her. Should he resolve upon having her altered, unless he enters into a contract with a builder, woe betide him; for many of the usual yacht-menders will run him up a bill which will very soon reach the amount he originally paid for his boat. That is a fact. Never give *carte blanche* to such a builder. Insist upon a definite sum being stated, or you will, almost to a certainty, be "done." The amount of copper nails and "hours of work" which a yacht-mender, not working by contract, can get into repairing or altering even a three-tonner is something marvellous—as I happen to know. Therefore, always insist upon coming to an understanding *before the work is begun*. Most certainly the man will at first argue that he cannot possibly tell the probable cost. If he says so, decline to employ him; then he will suddenly be struck with a "happy thought"—viz., that of calculating and measuring, &c.; and, finally, he will come to terms. Otherwise, if allowed to go on with the job, the men will waste weeks over a job which in reality could have been done in a few hours, or, at most, a few days. Trade always takes excellent care of itself.

Now, personally, I have never had any of my yachts transformed into shooting yachts proper. Just as I bought them, so I used them, and I found them answering quite as well as shooting yachts proper. In mild weather I stand on deck on the forecastle with my Dollond; but if it be rough, and I should be as likely as not pitched overboard, I get into the hatchway. A few planks are placed below across the fore cabin from seat to seat, and thus I have a safe footing, and

cannot possibly get overboard, since half of my body is in, and the other half out of the fore cabin. In that position I have a good view all round and ahead, and with the jib and foresail well triced up, I can fire either way without any bother or difficulty. When flocks, bunches, trips, or knobs are in question, a stanchion gun should be used, and the widgeon, teal, or duck put up before firing, whether the sea be calm or rough. (A bunch is thirty or forty, a trip a score or so, and a knob a dozen or so.) Otherwise, if the birds are by twos and threes, as will sometimes occur, it is hardly worth while then to fire a stanchion gun, and a couple of 4-bore guns will answer well enough.

My own 4-bores are loaded with 140grs. of Schultze powder, and 3oz. of shot. Of the latter, I use B shot for long range, and No. 2 for shorter work. For shore birds I use No. 4, as they generally pass within 80 yards or so, and No. 4 then is quite heavy enough to settle those that it hits. But for any range beyond 80 yards, large shot must be resorted to. It is the density of each pellet then which gives it its killing power, and firing No. 4 shot at any birds which are 100 yards off or so, is almost a waste of ammunition; whereas, should the gun be loaded with B shot, every pellet that strikes fairly will certainly do more or less damage. I have disabled many birds at certainly at least 120 yards, with B shot.

Whilst on this point, I would again urge upon all makers of heavy shoulder-guns the absolute necessity of having them all built on the hammerless plans, for this very simple reason. A 4-bore will weigh about 15lb., more or less. If placed in a boat, and it slips about, the hammer (if the gun is with a hammer), is sure to catch into and strike something hard,—a board, a rib, &c.—and the blow will, in many cases, be quite sufficient (as I can personally testify) to break it, or else smash the tumbler. And no wonder: multiply the weight of the gun by the square of the speed at which it strikes, and you will obtain a blow sufficient to smash almost anything protruding out of a gun. *Ergo*, down with hammers in all guns that are used on board boats, but specially in all heavy guns that are so used. Indeed, I am so accustomed to that

sort of accident that I almost invariably carry a spare lock, or at least a new hammer, whenever I go for a wildfowl shooting trip; and, to show that the precaution is far from useless, I may state that I have had certainly twenty hammers broken, and, last winter, the tumbler of one of my 4-bores actually gave way. Therefore, I think hammerless guns should be absolutely *the* guns for wildfowl shooting from boats, as none other will stand the rough knocking about, unless one takes extraordinary precautions for their safety. Even the cripple guns, although much lighter than 4-bores, frequently come to grief in the same manner. Consequently, all wildfowl guns should be hammerless guns.

The stanchion guns are generally rigged over the bows, their swivel working into a strong knee, and almost invariably they are fitted with a recoil apparatus. There are, however, some men who fire them direct from the knee, without any precautions for taking up the recoil. I cannot say that I like that style at all. Putting aside the danger, I think the shot must be but poorly delivered, as the gun must jump terribly, being so confined. A recoil apparatus in the style I described at page 91, as being a joint device of Mr. Hugh Silver and myself, would be the thing, since it provides for both recoil and after-recoil, and the gun can be put into position and taken up in a moment, without the slightest trouble, the swivel having only to be inserted into or taken out of the knee.

In smooth weather, firing from the bows is the best plan; but in a choppy sea, such as one will meet when a strong tide and a head wind have to be encountered, the plunging of the craft is, at times, so severe as to preclude anything like a fair delivery of the shot. In such cases the gun should be removed from the bows—where, by the way, the shooter gets not only bothered in his aim, but deluged with spray—and be rigged aft in the cockpit, where two knees should be provided for its reception, one on each counter. If the boat is then properly managed, very good execution can be done in that manner. The plunging of the boat is not nearly so great there, of course; in fact, it is almost as if one were standing

in the middle of a plank evenly balanced in its middle, and it stands to reason that the motion will hardly be felt there, whereas at either end it would be a swing with a vengeance.

If the stanchion gun is properly rigged in the cockpit, one can fire it very easily, almost as easily as from the bows; but a great deal depends on the man at the helm, who must be an adept at the craft. Put a novice at the helm, and you shall not have a single kill, although the fowl may be abundant and pretty tame. Have an experienced man, and he will show you sport when others would think the trip a hopeless one. It is the same in everything; experience is the main point.

A shooting yacht is never completely equipped without at least a single-handed punt being aboard. The punt is usually lashed on deck, bottom upwards, and rarely or never towed astern. Most single-handed punts, if thus towed, would inevitably fill and sink when the yacht was tacking, because these punts, having no keel, or hardly any, do not at all answer to a sudden side pull, and thus would fill or heel over. Therefore, the safest plan in all cases is to have the punt aboard. If, however, the shooter uses a double-handed punt, and she is built with a view to the contingency of her having to be towed, then she rides astern with more or less success; but then double-handed punts are vastly more substantial craft than single-handed ones, and can do things which the latter cannot be expected to perform. Anyhow, a punt must be provided when shooters go yacht-gunning; and in case of rough weather, and the crippled or dead birds drift over shallows where the yacht cannot follow them, a sound dinghy must be also at hand, because the punt could not be safely launched—or used, for the matter of that. Hence, whenever I go on yacht-gunning trips, I invariably have a dinghy riding astern of the yacht, and a small punt lashed on deck, and her gun, ammunition box, cripple gun, paddles or scull, and mast and sail, ready to be shipped into her as soon as she is launched. The reason for this precaution is simply this. It often occurs that geese, for

instance, will be over shallows where the yacht cannot possibly be sailed, and the dinghy herself would be totally useless, not only because she would draw a few inches too much water to allow the shooter to get near the geese, but also because she would ride too high to warrant the shooter to trust to her in order to overreach the birds. Therefore, a punt must be then resorted to ; but the weather must be tolerably suitable—*cela s'entend*—otherwise the gunner might become food for crabs. Howbeit, with proper care and fair luck, one pulls through most things, and I think most decidedly that it is always the best plan to be provided with everything one may require. Indeed, this is the only way to command success, particularly for wildfowl shooting ; no trouble should be spared, and one must foresee every possible contingency, if one wishes to be successful. It is, I trow, most awfully riling to find oneself fifteen miles from harbour, near several large gaggles or flocks, and, not having provided a punt, to have to let the birds alone, after having taken the trouble to sail thus far, and wasted nearly all day in pursuit of the wary fowl.

Large yachts, such as those which are regularly going to Holland for the wildfowl season, always carry, not one, but several punts, and every shooter aboard has his own, with her full equipment. That is the way to do it. I have been on board two or three such yachts where the show of craft and of punt guns would have been large enough to stock a small boat-builder's yard and a gunmaker's shop. That is what I call business-like arrangements. In such yachts every gun is cleaned once a day, and placed in its rack when not wanted ; and the punts, recoil ropes, &c., are all seen to daily, and mended if required—in short, the whole affair is there conducted on strict principles and with rigorous discipline. Any one going near the powder locker, for instance, with a light or a lighted pipe or cigar, is fined instantly, and so on. This is quite a necessary rule when kegs of gunpowder are concerned, of course. The outfit of a yachting wildfowl shooter should comprise everything that a seaman may require—sou'-wester, oilskins or other thoroughly waterproof body covering, sea boots, very warm clothing (and an abundance of



that, in case of mishap and a change of clothes becoming necessary); a powerful sea glass, without which but very little can be done; a good Admiralty chart; and he must engage a good local pilot, who must also be a professional shooter, otherwise, farewell to sport, as a novice spoils the best chances; and, moreover, not only the yacht, but also the punt, must have a good compass, in case of a fog arising. As regards the artillery and its ammunition, every care should be taken of it. Cleaning rods should be at hand; spare hammers, screws, &c., should be handy; and there should always be lots of provisions and ammunition aboard. One never knows what may occur. The wind may get foul, or the boat may run aground, when one is miles away from harbour, and then it is somewhat consolatory to know that there is plenty to eat and drink aboard, anyhow. And as to ammunition, there should always, I repeat, be plenty of it and to spare, because it often happens that it is just when one runs short that a lot of fowl turn up and the best shots present themselves. Therefore I always provide more than I should ever require—ridiculously so, perhaps, in the estimation of some of my friends; but all I can say is that in several cases they were uncommonly glad to be able to fall back on what, at starting, they had been pleased to call my absurdly large stores. Such is human nature; and, now that I think of it, I fancy they rely, as a rule, a great deal too much on my good nature and foresight. Why, actually a fellow joined me the other day, and he had about ten cartridges in his pocket!

“What is the good of that?” I contemptuously queried.

“Oh,” he replied, “I knew you had a lot”!

Cool, that, is it not?

If that is not making game of me, I would like to know what is. But, then, I am only joking. What is mine is my friends’—I cannot say better—and another thing, what is theirs is mine, and that is also satisfactory. It is astonishing what a strong bond of friendship shooting together engenders amongst fellows.

The next two things required by the yacht gunner are mud shoes—those devised by me (see page 219) are, *of course*, the best, ahem!—and a landing net. Without these two adjuncts

one loses either time or birds, or both; *ergo*, never you be without. There is another thing which I must again insist upon, and that is to have all heavy shoulder guns fitted with a "Silver" pad and a trigger and trigger guard pads. These will render the firing of such big guns absolutely comfortable, and that is not saying a little, especially when many shots have to be fired in the course of the day. Those shooters who will take the hint will thank me for it I warrant.

The best time for making a large bag at sea, in my opinion, is just before, and just after, a storm. Thus, when the glass is going down, it is not at all a bad plan for the yacht-shooter to set sail on spec.; but he must not be too venturesome, and should arrange his plan of action so that, according to whichever way the wind may come, he should have a place of shelter to run to in case of downright danger, and a very sharp look-out should be kept for the coming storm, so as to take things just in time, and after picking up a few shots, run in, out of the mess—if a storm occurs. During the storm itself a good bag could be made doubtless, as the fowl are then perfectly bewildered, and thus offer the very nearest shots; but, by reason of the difficulty of managing the craft and of firing the stanchion with accuracy—although the fowl may allow you to almost put them up, broadly speaking—yet but little execution can be done, and for safety's sake it is best not to remain out in very dirty weather. At the same time, as long as the yacht is stout and well-manned, one must not take the alarm at every breeze—in short, one must run some risk, and, if everything is in proper order, it will be found that the rougher the weather the more shots one will have.

By "more shots" I do not mean a "larger bag;" I simply mean that many more times will the gun be brought into requisition, although the total killed then would not average the amount which can be gathered just before, or just after, the storm. In this way: when half a gale is blowing the companies soon split into trips and knobs, hence the shots are had at somewhat limited numbers, but more frequently; whereas, before the storm, the flocks are all congregated,

resting together, probably preparing themselves for those events which their instinct tells them are impending. Hence, if a powerful stanchion gun is then brought to bear upon them, great is the havoc; but once flushed and gone, there is no following them, as the weather may then become so squally as to render a farther trip on the sea of questionable advantage.

After a storm again the knobs rest complacently and try to recover their equanimity, which probably has been sorely ruffled by the heaving billows and the rough gale. They are then easily enough approached, but again the numbers of fowl which are then congregated together are small, hence every shot does not bring so many to bag as when fired into a flock; but, from a sportsman's point of view, the fun is all the greater for it. If I kill half a dozen birds, or even less, at a shot, and have half a dozen such shots in the course of a day, together with a crack now and then at curlews and shore birds or divers, &c., I am perfectly satisfied, and much prefer the excitement of every such shot—even with its diminished number of slain—to a regular hecatomb of two score or more birds at one shot, and that one shot the only one to be had during the day. But professionals, of course, do not view the matter from that point of view. With them, the whole affair is a question of £. s. d., and accordingly the more they can kill the better. Hence they rarely try much and long to overreach a few birds. They prefer biding their time, watching the flocks morning and evening, noting their favourite haunts, and when they know that a rare flock is assembled they leave their smack in the evening, in two or three punts, and give the said flock such a dusting as will well repay the men for their trouble, expense, and time. But this is shooting for the market. The sportsman, on the other hand—who only requires the fun and excitement of the thing—does not care for large numbers of fowl at one shot, except now and then, just as a criterion of what he can do when he likes. At the same time it must be admitted that I never knew a man—professional or amateur—who did not knock over as many fowl as ever he could with every one of his shots;

but what I know for a fact is that I have known some amateurs—among whom I class myself—who would rather fire ten shots a day and have fewer birds, than fire a heavy shot and collect a cloud of fowl. And that is precisely why sailing to fowl is such a favourite pursuit with amateurs. In a good locality, with a good boat, good men as crew, good guns and plenty of ammunition, the fun waxes more or less fast and furious. None but those who have enjoyed the excitement of the thing can picture what it is like, and when I state that I have often fired two hundred shots in one day when at sea, including shots from the stanchion, the 4-bores, and the cripple guns, I think it will be allowed that there was fun to be had on those days. I do not wish it to be understood, by any means, that every shot told—very far from it. There is no pursuit where a greater waste of ammunition occurs than when sailing to fowl. I guess thereupon someone will take me to task, and say that *he* never fired 200 shots in a day. “*He* fires only half a dozen or so, sir, and nails all his fowl like clockwork.” That is all very well *on paper*, but I know better. Those who do not keep a tally of the shots they fire would be surprised if they were to be told their number; and, as regards killing, there is no place like the sea for bad aiming, and there are no birds so difficult to hit, and so hard to kill when hit, as wildfowl of almost every species, barring perhaps teal, who do not seem to require much. No one could believe what a lot of shot a crippled goose, or duck, or widgeon (aided by the turbulent sea) will require ere he gives up the ghost. I shoot, I honestly believe, as well as most men; at least, as well as those I have shot with heretofore; and therefore if I waste now and then a dozen shots to secure a bird at sea, I fancy other men would do the same. You see one has not a very safe footing, as the boat is continually on the move; then the rigging, or the sails, will come in your way; then there are the waves which make the crippled bird go up and down in a most desperate manner, &c.; so that really it bothers one not a little how to polish off the said cripple, particularly if he is at all lively, and can keep off the boat at a goodish range. Were he flying, he could easily be settled, for three reasons;

he would offer a better mark to the gunner, a better target to the shot, and the waves would not intercept any of the loads which are sent to his address.

Yes; collecting lively cripples invariably causes a great waste of ammunition, if the sea is at all rough. I remember once a friend and I fired over twenty shots at a winged mallard. He was about fifty yards from us, swimming away vigorously on our starboard, and we could not get nearer to him on account of the shallows. So, Ken and I stood on deck and "let him have it," whenever we could catch a glimpse of him, but it was tough work; the sea was choppy, the wind rough, we could not see him, and were nearly pitched overboard ourselves more than once, and altogether the thing was rather exciting.

"Shall we never get the beggar?" quoth Kenneth, after we had peppered the sea all around the bird with nearly twenty shots. "Here goes another!" and he fired again, when down the bird went once again.

I went forward, and with my finger on the trigger I watched for his reappearance. Up came his head, and before he was fully out of the water I pulled.

"He is down again!" yelled Ken, with frantic delight, and dancing for joy.

"So he is!" I replied ruefully. "The very fiend must be in his body!" But his time was run, and when he turned up again, his red paddles were turned towards the sky. He was as dead as a door nail! and we wiped our foreheads with satisfaction.

Talking about cripple guns, it will be remembered that I mentioned (page 335) I had had a cripple gun built for me by Messrs. Bland, of the Strand. I have had since a thorough trial of the gun at fowl and on game; indeed, I have even shot partridges with it, and I think that not only am I personally entitled to say that a better all-round killing gun I have never had, but that the friends who have shot with me will spontaneously testify that they never—no never!—have seen a better performer. Indeed, so marvellous was it, that two of them have been investing in similar

guns. That is pretty conclusive, I should think. Now, for wildfowl, from what I have stated, it will be seen that a very hard-driving gun is absolutely necessary for cripple work. Hence I think I can strongly recommend Messrs. Bland's full-choked guns. But, for boat work, hammerless guns are the thing in any case, for reasons which I have repeatedly pointed out, and which are of so obvious a nature as to need no enlarging upon.

When sailing to fowl, it will be found that, when there is but little wind, and snow and hail are falling, reaching the birds is very easy work indeed. They appear to let the boats come up to them with the utmost indifference. Indeed, it has occurred to me several times to sail clean through a trip of birds in such a fashion that some of them rose to port and others to starboard. I need not add that this occurred only when actually no look-out was kept, either when we were refreshing ourselves, or the men were too busy with the boat to look ahead. Nevertheless, there remains the fact that the yacht did actually sail clean through the lot, and they seemingly cared only to make room for it, and kept themselves some fifty or sixty yards away on either side, if they did not rise. Geese, however, almost invariably rise, and sheer off as soon as ever a craft gets too near them, or appears to crowd on them. Hence, the only way of overreaching those customers consists in working the boat so as to fetch to their windward, and luffing up the very moment they rise. That is the only method which will answer for geese, and the faster this manoeuvre is executed the better. I have always found it best to have full sail set when a gaggle of geese had to be tackled, because by having all the canvas brought into requisition, it often occurs that you get on the birds before they know where they are; whereas, if you attempted to do the thing slowly they would take the alarm and be off long before you could be near enough to them for a shot. If the geese cannot be sailed to windward, sailing to the leeward should not be attempted; the birds will not put up with it. Therefore, whenever the shallows preclude the yacht from being sailed to a gaggle, the only method to be pursued consists in

launching the punt or punts, and paddling or sculling to them in the usual style; when it will be found that not only the punt may be successful, but, if the yacht be judiciously sailed about in the probable route which the geese may take in their flight, a shot may possibly be had then from the yacht also. Perhaps not with the stanchion gun, because the geese would have gathered too much way, and possibly may pass too high up for the stanchion to do any execution; but the large-bore shoulder guns can then be used with more or less efficacy, as the birds, when passing overhead, offer a very fair mark.

When sailing actually to fowl, if the helmsman is not an experienced fowler, he should not have absolute control over the boat, but be taught to obey certain signals, which should be given to him by the most experienced fowler on board. I need not remark that these signals must be made under the shelter of the bulwarks. In short, the birds should not be able to see any motion whatsoever on board the boat. The shooter's eyes should just be visible, and the helmsman should crouch as much as possible aft, and not attempt to see the birds himself, but simply obey the signals that are given him. Privately, a motion of my left hand behind my back meant port, of the right hand, starboard, and a sweep of either hand meant to luff up at once to them. By these means, with a fast-sailing cutter, one is enabled to come up to the birds so silently and so effectively as to take them altogether by surprise. No talking, or smoking, or standing about, should be allowed from the very moment that the birds are being worked up to. Indeed, at any time, the less noise the better on board a shooting-yacht. But still, to some extent, there is no need of making a toil of a pleasure, and life on board a shooting yacht is very jolly indeed. When nothing was in sight we often used to play cards, or talk, or smoke, or read novels, eat, drink, and be merry, but either one of the men, or one of us, was always on the watch with a good sea glass; and, from the moment the birds were descried, everything else had to give way to the all-important object in view—i.e., that of getting a shot at them. As regards this watching for birds, I must say I enjoy it as much as anything else in the

whole affair. There is, to me, an irresistible attraction in being thus alone on the forecastle, scanning the sea and the horizon with a powerful glass for gaggles, skeins, companies, bunches, trips, or knobs; and I certainly must say that some of my most pleasant days were thus spent. One never tires of it; there is always something new turning up. Now, it is a diver, which eyes you solemnly as you pass; he is on the counter, a goodish way off, and dives smartly as you sail swiftly by. Then, far away in the distance, a string is on the wing, and you keep the glass on them until they disappear in the far-distant mists of the sea. By-and-by, as you slowly sweep the sea in front of the craft, you catch a glimpse of a few small heads riding on the top of a wave. You keep the glass on, until, on the next wave, you see again what you were at first inclined to believe an illusion of your eyesight, and, to your great delight, you make out a knob of widgeon complacently resting on the sea. You pass the word aft. The man at the helm brightens up; your companions, who were in the cabin, turn up in arms—in all the senses of the word—and henceforth all is suppressed excitement on board. These are truly exciting moments. The birds are at once focussed by all the available glasses in the craft, and everyone's energies are bent on their destruction.

Howbeit, whether the sail be successful or not, the next watch should be undertaken by another man, because the exposure in severe weather is very great, and would tax any one man's constitution if carried on uninterruptedly for too long a time. But, generally speaking, the excitement of being on the look-out is so great, that I have often seen everyone on board remaining on deck, more or less, throughout the day, watching, and of course in such a case the chances of detecting fowl are greater than ever. It is a proverbial saying that two or more pairs of eyes see better than one, and never was the saying better exemplified than when the question at issue is to watch for wildfowl. Astonishing as it may seem, it will sometimes occur that, to everyone's surprise, birds will suddenly appear on the counter or ahead, which hitherto had baffled detection. Of course, this sort of thing occurs only in a sea, because if



the surface of the water be smooth, anything floating or sitting thereon is readily descried. For the same reason, after a heavy shot at geese, when some of the droppers fall a very long way off, if the sea is at all rough it is most difficult indeed to find the birds, although they may have been marked carefully, and fairly reliable bearings of their likely pitch may have been taken. The best way then is to sail, on and off, down the tideway, until the marked droppers are all picked up.

In hard winters, when ice floes are about the estuaries, it is never safe to sail a yacht, unless she is copper-bottomed; otherwise, were she to strike a heavy floe, she might be staved in.

Some years ago it was proposed to use steam launches for wildfowl shooting. These will do well enough to carry the punts and the shooters to and from their field of action; but they are too noisy to work up to fowl. Of course, some shots may be had from their decks now and then; but, generally speaking, they should not be depended upon for actual shooting.

In some shallow estuaries small open sailing boats are often resorted to for sailing to fowl, as the birds do not seem to mind them so much as they would yachts, and they draw less water by far. The illustration opposite shows such a boat in actual work. There were four of us in her on that day, and rare good sport we had, as the weather was very cold, and snow was falling the whole day. Such boats, however, should, by rights, be built with a lot of beam and a deckway all round, and if with a small cuddy, all the better for the comfort of the shooters, who will be glad to creep in now and then when pinched by the sharp frost. I have known some centre-board boats used also for the purpose with very great success. The convenience of such boats is simply undeniable wherever shallows abound; but, broadly speaking, they are not extensively used on the British coast. In America, however, they are very much patronised.

Sailing to fowl is generally carried out in daytime; but in some districts most moonlight nights are eagerly spent by



WILDFOWL SHOOTING FROM A DINGHY.



many shooters in sailing boats and shooting yachts, knocking about the mouths of the rivers. The same rules which govern punting naturally hold good for sailing to fowl then, *i.e.*, one should sail from the loom towards the light, so as not to be perceived *by* the fowl, and be able to perceive *them*. Therein lies the whole secret of successful night shooting on water, whether from a punt or from a yacht.

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## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### DECOYING TO THE GUN.

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OfT and oft have I wondered how it was that a mere streak of sea between the British kingdom and the Continent could so thoroughly insulate British shooters from Continental ways; that means of overreaching wildfowl which are known to almost every child on the Continent are here so rarely resorted to. Let us, for instance, consider duck decoying as I have seen it carried on in Holland and in France. In both these countries, ninety-nine bagged ducks, teal, or widgeon, out of every hundred, are killed *à la hutte*, i.e., are decoyed to the gun, and shot either wholesale or singly, but more generally the former; and yet, on this side of the Channel, a call duck is almost a thing unknown, as far as practical decoying is concerned—I mean for shooting. As regards decoying into pipes in proper decoys, there is probably no nation in the world where the art is so nicely understood as it is here; but I now speak exclusively of shooting *pur et simple*.

Well, then, I repeat it, is it not somewhat surprising that a means by which nine-tenths of the birds offered in the Continental markets are obtained should have been here entirely neglected, or nearly so, for I know but very few districts where duck decoying to the gun is carried on, and these are exceptions to the rule.

Doubtless, some strict purist will exclaim, "Duck decoying to the gun, my dear sir, is not resorted to here, because the British sportsman is a sportsman, and despises killing several birds at a shot."

"Does he, though?" I would beg to reply. "Then how do you account for the great hold which punting has taken on British wildfowl shooters?"

No. The fact of the matter is simply this: wildfowl *will* congregate, and must, therefore, be shot in (more or less) great numbers, either at sea or at the hut; and the only difference that I can perceive between the æsthetics of either pursuit (*i.e.*, decoying or punting) lies simply in the fact that here we punt, and look down upon decoying; whilst on the Continent they decoy, and deprecate punting loudly.

Which is right and which is wrong is a pure matter of fancy. In my opinion both sides are right. We punt because our estuaries and our coasts are thoroughly and eminently fitted for the sport; they decoy, because their marshes are not yet thoroughly drained, and they find that decoying is about the only means they have of enjoying night wildfowl shooting. But why they should abominate punting, and call it "murder," or why we should taboo decoying, and call it "slaughter," is one of those extraordinary cases in which the tint of the glasses through which one is looking must account for the aspect in which the object looked at does appear.

However, things, even of a sporting character, are daily improving, and no doubt the sporting mind is being thoroughly educated nowadays. A sportsman in well-to-do circumstances travels a good deal, and gets more and more cosmopolitan in his views—and this is as it should be. The time has gone by when nothing but what was thoroughly British was to be considered as being good. This was all very well when a lot of ignorant noodles, wedded to their narrow districts, ruled the roast; but now public opinion has swept away these petty prejudices, and the educated sportsman who knows "what is what," culls the sweets of sport everywhere, and finds things congenial to his taste in every clime. Now, duck decoying to the gun, which has been comparatively unknown here, has been enjoyed, to my knowledge, by hundreds of sportsmen when they travelled abroad, and, in sober truth, there is a deal of attractive fascination into it, when it is artistically carried on, as it is, say, in Holland, for instance; for, be it borne in

mind, decoying is either a very easy or a very difficult thing to perform, and as the matter remains almost entirely with the elements and the fowl, it is no small criterion of a man's skill when he succeeds, even under very adverse circumstances, in decoying within range a lot of fowl which no other man but himself, perhaps, could have induced to stay. That is where the "pull" comes in, and to say that there is "nothing in it" is simply to betray the most abject ignorance of the subject.

I am fully aware that at times nothing is easier than decoying ducks to the hut. I, who write this, have seen with my own eyes, and killed with my own gun, three ducks which were decoyed to a hut in day time by three wooden decoys! Truly, these three ducks had required no great enticements. But then, I should explain how it occurred. Imagine a hard frost of a fortnight's standing, the whole earth iron-bound, and covered with snow, not a running stream or spring for many miles, not a particle of food for the fowl except at sea; and then a terrific storm, which bothered the flocks not a little, had been raging for two or three days. Such then were the conditions under which I bagged those three birds, and it occurred in the following manner:

I was shooting in the *marais* of Slack, in the neighbourhood of Wimille, Pas de Calais, when I spied the three wooden decoys above alluded to. I went to look at them; they were simply carved roughly in wood, and each one was stuck on a piece of stick, which acted as legs, in front of a low hut, covered over with turf, and compared to which a dog kennel would have been a palace. Whilst examining the concern, and pondering on the ingenuity of man, I perceived that a lot of fowl were overhead, and an idea struck me: "Happy thought! Get in, and watch. Half an hour or so will not be amiss; I am tired; I will rest, and watch the fowl, see where they pitch, and perhaps be able to stalk them." No sooner said than done. In I went, feet first, and, resting on my elbow, I looked after the companies. They, however, appeared travelling fast, and unlikely to settle; but at last a dozen or so began lowering their flight, circled over the river, which was within two hundred yards of my place of vantage, and hope arose within

my breast. In fact, so intent was I on watching them, that my head was almost out of the hut, when suddenly a rustle of wings was heard, so close to me that I involuntarily bobbed in back like a shot, and lo! three ducks were throwing up their heads, and alighting near the dummies.

To say that I was astounded is to say nothing! My breath was quite taken away. There they were, shaking their wings and pluming themselves, within fifteen yards of my gun, and evidently they fancied themselves in the most absolute security. In broad daylight at three p.m., and with a double 12-bore handy—like Pat's parrot, I said nothing; but I thought a vast deal, gently laid hold of the "instrument of warfare," and before they knew where they were, my shot had sent the three of them to their happy feeding grounds.

Well, now, that is one instance of a case in which duck decoying, to my personal knowledge, was exceedingly easy. But, then, all other circumstances were favourable to it, and such a thing might possibly not occur to any one man for the remainder of a whole season. That it happens frequently when hard winters occur is well known. Many *huttiars* watch at their *huttes* both day and night, and, besides ducks and teal, they kill curlews, plovers, &c., at their huts in daytime, especially when they have live decoys; but that "dummies" are also very successful now and then has been proved repeatedly to demonstration, although, of course, their powers of attractiveness must necessarily be vastly inferior to that of call birds. Respecting the latter, it is surprising to find what a difference it makes in the bag if they are used scientifically (if I may so express myself) by a man who thoroughly understands his business.

Now, I do not wish to be personal, but I must say that, from my own private experience, the Dutch are vastly superior to the French in their handling of decoy ducks. Of course, I may have been unfortunate in the case of the latter by falling in with some men who did not understand their work; but all I can do is to go by what I have seen, and I must confess that, from what I have seen of French decoying, it quite lacks the finish and extreme attractiveness of the Dutch plan. The

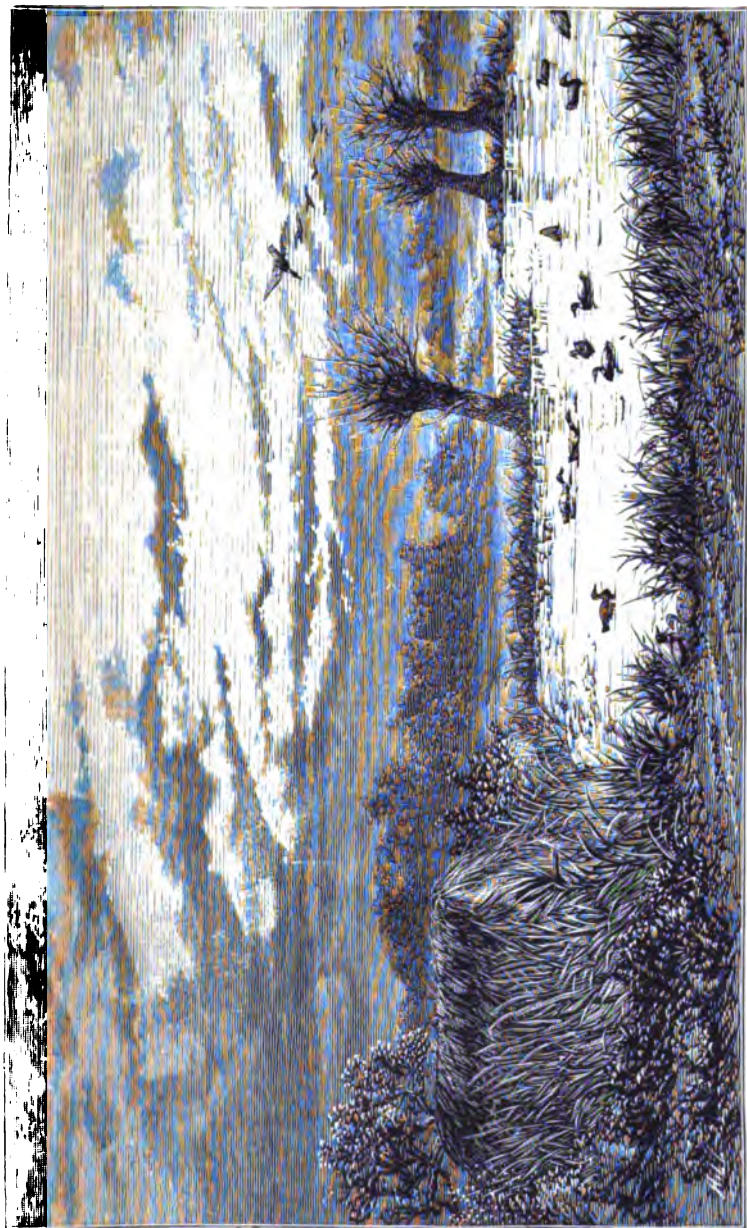


latter, in my opinion, is the very acme of perfection in the art; and, as I will describe it at length hereafter, my readers will be able to judge for themselves.

Now, this is how the French practise decoying. But I must again repeat it, it is very possible that I may not have seen the best of it. I always try to see every kind of sport wherever I go or chance to be; but I may have been unfortunate in my choice of *huttiars*. Anyhow, this is how I have seen decoying practised in France. The whole of the call birds are simply tethered to lines in front of the huts in some cases; or else the ducks alone are tethered permanently to lines, whilst the drake is tied by the leg to a long line, one end of which is in the hut, near the duck shooter's hand; and with this line he can draw the drake, *nolens volens*, towards the hut whenever required. Sometimes, however, the drake is made fast, and the ducks are each on a loose line, and drawn in gently when needed. This is done, in both cases, so as to cause the call birds to call their loudest when wild birds are about; and either case answers very well, inasmuch that, whether the drake is drawn away from his ducks or the ducks are drawn away from the drake, the whole of them are sure to set up a chatter amongst themselves, and this is certain to attract the attention of any of the flights which may be then passing overhead.

But all these are at best, it must be confessed, but clumsy expedients. They answer, it is true, but they do not come near the exquisite working of the Dutch call ducks. The latter are to the former what a champion cueist will be at billiards as compared to an ordinary amateur—the latter may be amusing enough, but the former is fascinating; and this is exactly the case of Dutch decoying. I never was more interested in my life than when I saw it practised for the first time.

Imagine a largish hut (see illustration opposite), so well covered over with turf and reeds that until one stumbled upon it one really could not see it. Plenty of fresh straw inside, an aperture facing a 40-yard wide pool of water, lined with a heavy fringe of reeds; but the middle of the pool was perfectly open, for the obvious reason that nothing must be in the way between the shooters and their quarry. We got into the hut



DUCK DECORING TO A HUT.



—the owner and I, whilst his professional *huttier* was setting up the ducks with their lines on the pond.

That done, he came in too, and the retrieving poodle sat up in a corner watching his proceedings. The man had brought in with him a flat basket with a lid to it, and that basket he placed in the right-hand side corner, handy at any time. Near it was an old wooden shoe filled with oats. Someone hereupon will exclaim, "A wooden shoe! There must be a mistake somewhere!" No, gentle reader, there is no mistake in the matter, and the object of the wooden shoe, and of its contents, will presently appear.

Well, then, there we were; making ourselves as comfortable as we could, and the poodle, seeing everything peaceful, eventually coiled himself up and went to sleep. The ducks outside meanwhile were clattering, flapping their wings, and talking to their hearts' content; and our man was keeping watch, resting on his elbows in front of us, at the aperture of the hut.

The moon had risen and was facing us, thus making of the pond a broad sheet of light—than which nothing could have been better. Moreover, we could hear now and then the whistling of widgeon and the whirring of ducks as they went by, but very high and swiftly, overhead; and they seemed to pay little attention to the call birds. At last, however, the man held up his hand warningly, and we got ready. He then rose on his knees, took up his drake out of the basket, and, without more ado, tossed him up as if he had been a pigeon sent with a message. Up went the bird, gathering speed as he went, and in a moment we lost sight of him, as he whirled from the light into the loom.

"Good bird, that," whispered my host in my ear.

"Where has he gone to?" queried I.

"Why, to the wild birds," said he.

"No!"

"Yes, most decidedly; as you will soon see."

And he explained to me that as soon as he is pitched, up the drake goes to the strangers, who think that he is one of themselves, and then when he circles back to the pond and the hut, the guileless wild ones follow suit, think that he has found a

nice comfortable feeding place and is showing them the way. They come in his wake, see the ducks on the pond; their confidence is thereby entirely confirmed, they give up all thoughts of alarm, settle on the pond—and get shot.

My host had just done explaining the affair succinctly, when a flop was heard on the water, and lo! there was a bird swimming towards us!

I laid hold of my gun promptly, but my host smiled. "It is our bird," he said. And I looked on with *all* my eyes and a wide-open mouth I am sure. The blessed drake was swimming towards us, and I then noticed a little hole at the bottom of the hut—something like those holes which are made in the doors of granaries, and so on, for the free entrance and exit of the feline tribe when they are in search of mice and other vermin. Through this hole into the hut then the beautiful bird stepped, as grave as a judge, and, waddling straight to the wooden shoe, he, muttering his thanks, helped himself—rather freely, I must say—to the oats it contained.

The *huttier* then gently put his hand under him, lifted him up, opened the lid of the basket, popped him back therein, shut the lid, and then withdrew noiselessly behind us, who were then ready at the aperture with our guns at full cock.

The call ducks were clamouring most energetically, and we could hear the wild birds flying close to the hut; the noise of their pinions, in their rapid motion, being most distinctly audible in the stillness of the night. They were evidently meditating a descent; presently they crossed the streak of light in front of us, disappeared, came back again, circled once more, and finally they came down all of a lump and settled on the pond.

We killed eight of them, or rather the poodle gathered eight of them, for there were only six that had been killed outright; but the cunning dog "went in" first for the cripples—like a sensible fellow.

Indeed, I cannot praise too highly the extraordinary intelligence which was displayed by the poodles I have seen at work, especially when duck decoying. I have repeatedly remarked on their proficiency; but really one cannot tire of

singing their praise. Their patience and cunning are marvellous. They will hunt for a cripple over and over again the same bed of reeds—let the cripple dive and do what he likes, if he is to be had, they will have him. They will watch for his re-appearance, listen for the ripple of the water when he pops up again, dive after him if necessary, and be on him like a shot. In the hut, they must not start up when they see you getting ready; they must not whine with excitement when the birds are on the water; they must not get out before the shot is fired or the order is given; and, finally, no matter how many times they may have to go backward and forward, they must not “sulk” after having retrieved a few birds, give up the others, and refuse to search for more, &c. So no wonder that poodles are *the dogs par excellence* for that sort of business, and I, for one, am very glad to see that poodles have become so fashionable here. Depend upon it, some of our retrievers are very good, but their breed will not take anything bad by being crossed with poodles. It is all nonsense to despise dogs from abroad simply because they are from abroad. A correspondent wrote lately that he thought that poodles should not be resorted to for crossing; they would stand on their heads, he argues, when wanted to retrieve. How ridiculous! Can anyone call that sort of thing argument? I call it a waste of time, of paper, and of ink. If our ancestors had acted on such narrow-minded principles, we should never have made of our pointers, for instance, the dogs they are now. To whom do we owe their nose, if not to the Spanish pointer? And why should not a poodle cross benefit our curly retrievers, as a breed, as well as the Spanish pointer has benefited our pointers? Is the poodle to be despised simply because he happens to be a foreign dog? Can it be possible that, in this enlightened age, there may be people arguing on such principles? If so, the height of absurdity is certainly reached. Let us be liberal and just in our views, anyhow, and give to Cæsar what is due to Cæsar, and to the poodle what is due to the poodle, viz., for his particular retrieving work, there is no dog in the world that will beat him or even come near him. A retriever will retrieve as well as he—granted; but where is the

retriever that will go twenty times, if there are twenty birds to be picked up, without "sulking," or having to be spoken to, or hearing the gun go off again to encourage him in his search, or a man to go with him to send him on, for every bird almost?

Of course different breaking and different work are the cause of this handicap of the retriever proper. He is rarely, or never, required to go alone after many birds without being ordered, and as far as his own line of action lies, he is now and then excellent; but for the particular work I allude to, the poodle beats him hollow, and that is my experience. I have had some of the best retrievers in the world, my sporting dogs have always been famous for their excellence, and I am fully aware of what good retrievers should be. I cannot say that I have tried them at duck decoying; but, from what I know of retrievers, I emphatically say that they would be "nowhere" at that sort of business with A 1 poodles. Poodles do not exclusively stand on their heads or dance a polka—and if they can be trained to do that sort of thing, why, it only proves that they must be far more intelligent and tractable than retrievers, that is all.

To return now to the *canards d'appel* of Dutch *huttierts*, it appears that the dodge for training the drakes is, like most clever things, exceedingly simple. The bird is kept hungry whenever it is arranged that his work shall be required. When he is pitched he cannot help himself, but must fly, probably from the fear of breaking his neck; then he joins the strangers simply for company's sake, ducks being exceedingly gregarious; then, as he knows that he will get fed at the hut, he comes back to the pond, and swims to the huts for his oats; and, as the clown says, "there you are."

Now, I put it to my readers, is not the dodge really clever? Is it not really interesting?

But I dare say someone will rejoin that he cannot see anything in it, because it is a *Dutch* dodge? Chauvinism is not dead yet anyhow, and it seems to thrive here in some odd corners, by all that is wonderful.

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## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### DECOYING TO THE GUN—(*Continued.*)

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It is only of late years that this system of killing wildfowl has been resorted to, here and there, in the British Islands; and I must repeat that I am at a loss to understand why our fowling men have been so slow in availing themselves of this mode of procedure. They cannot have pleaded ignorance on this subject, since from time immemorial the use of decoy ducks was known in all the fens that were worthy of the name, in connection with the regular decoys that were then worked on all sides throughout the season, and which paid withal very handsomely. *Ergo*, the fact that wildfowl are attracted by the sight of tame or semi-tame fowl was well known. This being so, how was it that the gun was not brought into play with them?

Well, for that state of things there seems to have been two reasons. The first of which was that wherever the fowl could readily be decoyed, regular decoys were set up in preference to any other mode of taking the fowl, because no noise was produced, and thereby the remainder of the fowl in the neighbourhood were not frightened, and eventually came into the pipes, too, and were also caught; whereas the gun, if used instead, would certainly have disturbed them.

Secondly, wherever fowl were to be had by stalking, flighting, or punting, any one of these means was generally adopted (that is, if no decoy was in the direct neighbourhood, for, within a certain area, no gun must be fired near a decoy,



under somewhat heavy penalties, of which more anon). It was then only in some privileged or private places, or at sea, that shooting was at all carried on even as late as the beginning of this century. Since then, however, many of the fens have been drained and many of the decoys were thereby destroyed, and where the work of drainage could scarcely be carried out, except at an extraordinary cost, unwarranted by the ultimate advantages to be derived therefrom, the swamps were allowed to remain, but many of these wilds were scarcely of a size to make the working of a decoy profitable, and so the gun was gradually brought into use over the ground, and now that decoy ducks have been well tried there, and found to answer, many men use them over these small marshes, to their great advantage; but the plan is not adopted so universally and so systematically as it is done on the Continent, where duck decoying to the gun is positively carried to the pitch of an art and a science, and is a regular trade. It has, nevertheless, some very serious drawbacks, amongst which not the least is that sleep for the time being is out of the question, and a duck decoyer, to be successful, must resign himself to passing the bitterest cold winter nights alone in the marsh in his hut, instead of being cosily cuddled up under his blankets. Yes, sirs, whilst we are all comfortable of a night in our respective homes, the whole coast, especially in France, is dotted here and there, wherever a marsh exists, with little huts, where these men are keeping watch, whilst their ducks, tethered on the water, are uttering their most enticing invitations to the fowl that fly by to come there—and get killed.

That this decoying is a successful undertaking will be readily admitted when I state that not only Paris and all the large French and other Continental towns are supplied with the fowl thus killed, but very large numbers find their way also to this side of the Channel, and we frequently have on our tables birds that were, in all likelihood, feeding two or three days previously in the marshes of the Pas de Calais or of the Somme.

In short, duck decoying to the gun is in its infancy as yet in many quarters of the British Kingdom, and to see it thoroughly well done one must therefore patronise a French or

Dutch professional, or else get an introduction to some of those Continental sportsmen who have set up a regular hut on their shootings as part and parcel of the sport to be had out of the marsh belonging thereto. I have visited several of these, and to say that they are awfully funny, is to say nothing. As to the sport of the affair, why, that is a matter of opinion; but there is, to be sure, much more fun to be had out of the thing than out of a grouse drive, or a battue, any day. On the one hand, you see the working of the call birds and the manœuvres of the *huttier*, and the scene is not altogether without some weird charm, but the actual killing of the birds is undoubtedly murder, *pur et simple*. The fowl settle often within fifteen yards of your gun, and you sweep into them deliberately a pot-shot, and that is the disagreeable feature of the thing. Were there any dangers to be encountered, as when punting, for instance, it would make the "rake" admissible, but one is comfortably enough ensconced in the hut, and therefore it does look hard lines certainly to have to shoot in the brown. But what is one to do? Supposing you deliberately eschewed shooting promiscuously into the thick, picked out an outsider and floored it, the chances are very great that you shall not be able to hit another bird with your second barrel, because the birds have naturally been scared by your first shot and are off, and, in your cramped position in the hut, a flying shot in the dark is next door to impossible. Besides which, the *huttier* will look upon you with scorn. He will, as soon as he returns to his village, narrate how the Englishman only killed one duck (or widgeon, as the case may be), when he had decoyed a good company to his hut, and the thing will spread all over the district with astonishing rapidity, to the utmost discomfiture of the sportsman, who will not fail to perceive how contemptuously he will henceforth be looked upon. For, strange as it may appear, wherever duck decoying is practised, the decoymen are invariably looked upon as miraculously clever shots. Now this is a most egregious mistake, as I will show. Blindfolded I will warrant I will kill as many birds as any *huttier*. It is the A B C of shooting. Yet these men pride themselves on their skill. There never was a greater mistake on their

part. That they are clever in setting up their huts, and in working their call ducks, no one will deny, but that is all. As concerns the killing, the veriest tyro will do it as well as the best crack shot that ever pulled trigger. Nay, a mere boy, with scarcely any experience of firearms, will be quite as successful as the best man, if he can hold the gun at all. Then why this extraordinary reputation of the hutters as marksmen? It is unaccountable, except in the following wise, that, whereas the uninitiated always judge of talents by results, seeing that a hutter comes home of a morning sometimes with a score or more of birds, they set that man down as being exceedingly clever with his gun. But a blind battery sweeping the front of his hut would have done just as well, or better; nay, this has actually been done. Many years ago now, a keeper set up a battery of guns, a hundred yards apart, to sweep the Virginia Water, and by connecting all the triggers with a wire he was enabled to fire them all from a distance, and one day he killed thus seventy wild ducks (see Colonel Hawker's book, eleventh edition, page 446). Well, now, my argument is that really the hutter need not be in his hut at all unless he chose. If he were to act as the aforesaid keeper—viz., set up one or two guns in his hut, and tie a string to the triggers—he could, from a distance, pull and kill his fowl just as well as if he were in the hut. *Ergo*, the killing requires no skill, and that is what I wanted to demonstrate.

Putting, however, aside the killing, the rest is a most entertaining piece of business, and I cannot do better than revert to it.

And, first of all, about the hut.

The hut must, of course, be near an open sheet of water. If there are reeds about, these are cut with a scythe, or even rooted out everywhere in front of the hut. If the water is not stagnant, but liable to rise or recede according as there is a flood, or some sluices are left open about the marsh, then the hut must be made somewhat portable. There are then two sorts of huts: the fixed ones, which are built more or less substantially and well hidden, and the portable ones, which are very light, well disguised, and easily moved and shifted.

The fixed huts are built by the side of some natural or artificial ponds, whose surface the guns can pretty generally cover. When the ponds are, however, too large, stakes painted white are driven about, forming a sort of semicircle of a radius equal to the known killing range of the guns. Any birds within that "charmed" semicircle are fired at; any birds beyond it are let alone until they are drawn within range. Were it not for these "range" posts it would be sometimes impossible for the shooters to know, at night for instance, whether the birds before them are or are not likely to be killed if fired at. Even in daytime it will be found that it is no easy matter to decide at what distance one stands from birds that are actually squatting on water. Water deceives the eye completely, unless the eye is taught by repeated experiments to judge correctly of distances. One thing is clear, men have fired at ducks that were a hundred yards off, thinking they were well within range. The fact is, by fixing one's eyes some little time on a bird sitting on water the bird is delineated so clearly by its surroundings, that involuntarily one comes to the conclusion that it must be a great deal nearer than it really is. This will especially occur if one chances to be handling a gun at the time. The excitement of the affair, the chance of the shot, the fear of losing it by delaying too long, everything conspires to render the shooter's calculations unsatisfactory, or to set them at defiance. He accordingly fires and finds his pellets falling short half-way or so, whilst the startled fowl rise, screaming murder, and sheer off with all speed. I know what it is; I have been taken in myself thus more than once!

From all this, the absolute necessity of having "range" posts will be made very apparent. Now, these posts cannot be used when removable huts are resorted to, since the ground is changed sometimes every day. In this case, however, the clear space of water in front of the hut is rarely above thirty or forty yards across from the shooter.

Some fixed huts are built very substantially, say in downs, and when the brickwork is done and well set, the whole is covered over with sand; and rank grass, brambles, &c., are encouraged to grow over all, so as to hide it as much as possible. Inside

there are lockers for drinks, &c., and generally one can be pretty comfortable there.

The reverse, however, is the case with movable huts, or with those that are built in perfectly open ground.

The former must be so light as to be easily carried backward and forward, according as the water rises or falls, and both must be so low, and so unassuming, as not to give the alarm to the fowl, who fight very shy of anything unusual, or uncommon, in the flat marshes.

Now, a portable hut is very much like a long, flat basket, with a round top, thatched with straw, and with only an opening in front, exactly like the entrance to a dog kennel. This sort of hut is made as follows:—Two poles, pretty straight if possible, are bored with holes, into which are fixed, crosswise, the points of sticks of equal length, which thus join the poles. This constitutes the flooring of the hut. Holes are then bored on the top parts of the poles, and in these holes the ends of willow wands of equal length are thrust—thus making a sort of tunnel shape. This shape is covered over with straw, reeds, &c., so as to make it appear as much like its direct surroundings as possible; the back of it is stopped in the same manner, and the front ditto, barring a small aperture, just large enough for the shooter to crawl through. The bottom of the hut is profusely covered with straw, and thus a very light, easily carried concern is rigged out at no cost whatsoever, since the straw and reeds, sticks and poles can be had for the picking up.

The fixed open marsh hut is still more roughly made. A trench is dug with a spade round the extent of ground which the hut is to cover. The earth from the trench is piled on that ground, thus raising it above the surrounding land, and securing to it a certain amount of dryness. Over this earth, when dry, some willow wands are fixed, in tunnel-shape, too, by simply thrusting the ends in on either side. These are thatched over with straw, reeds, grass, &c., and covered over with earth and grass; the bottom end is blocked, the floor is provided with a bundle of dry straw; the front part is open just wide enough to crawl through, and thus the shooter has an ambush

much lower than a Newfoundland's kennel, far less comfortable, but warm enough in all conscience, and certainly not to be distinguished from the natural features of the marsh, unless directly and closely pointed out. That is the strong point of the contrivance.

I have seen some such huts over which grass actually grew, and I could not discover them until tumbling over them almost. A few frogs and water beetles no doubt get into them now and then, and thus keep company with the wildfowl shooter, who is there lying down at full length, waiting till it may please the wild birds to listen to his charmers. Dreary waiting, truly, when the birds won't come, but truly charming enough when they do, as I personally can testify.

Some years ago I was shooting over a marsh in the North of France, and the weather suddenly turned terrifically cold. A blowing north-easter came on next, and, of course, I knew that good sport was drawing nigh.

The next day snow was on the ground a foot deep, and it was freezing as hard as could be; and this lasted a week. The bags I made were simply tremendous. Why, ducks and widgeon were passing and re-passing continually, even over the cliffs. One had only to hold straight—plenty of shots offered themselves.

Well, I was delighted. I was almost alone. The French shooters, not relishing that sort of weather at all, stopped at home, and I inwardly thanked my stars that they did. At last the thaw came, and I then left the sea-shore for the marsh, where, as a matter of course, the birds flocked to feed. I gave them a grand dusting on the first day, and was in the seventh heaven of delight. Towards evening I was wending my way back towards the shore, when I pitched upon a *huttier*, who, with his old gun and call ducks, was going to his hut. I was tired with the day's exertions, and I thought it would rest me to get into the hut and see how it was worked. I could stop an hour or two, I thought, and then go home. (I stopped all night, though, but of this more anon.) Well, I made an overture to the man; he accepted at once my offer, viz., 5 francs and all I shot, and we went to the hut.

It was just large enough to hold us—a tight fit, though. The man had but three ducks, two of which he proceeded to fasten to some stakes, he wading in the shallow water to do so, and scarcely had he done so, and brought his drake in, than three widgeon pitched on the pool. I killed two at one shot, and settled the third, who had been crippled by the first shot, with my second barrel. Out flew the man. He picked up the birds, ran back again, “worked” his drake again, and with such success that a couple of teal that were flying by came down, never to rise again. We remained all night at it, and I shot forty-two head, including teal, widgeon, and duck.

The next day I came again, but only got one shot—killing five ducks with my two barrels. The third day the wind had changed, not a bird came, and, in fact, for a week the man hardly got more than three or four birds.

This tends to show that in such matters one should always make the most of one’s opportunity. Let that escape, and all is over pretty well as regards making a big bag, but that hutting pays in the long run there is no doubt. If it did not the huts would not be all tenanted as regularly as they are, that is very certain. Well, then, why do not professional British wildfowl shooters take to it more kindly? It is a sure draw to the birds, and one that supplies more than half the markets of Europe with fowl. It only requires patience, ingenuity, and call ducks; no insuperable difficulties are, therefore, in the way, and I commend the plan to all whom it may concern.

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## CHAPTER XXXV.

### DECOYING IN AMERICA.

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BESIDES live ducks being employed in sundry fashions for decoying wildfowl to the gun, as I have already explained, a variety of means are resorted to, in order to overreach the various species of birds. Amongst these, artificial decoys come first, and they are made with all sorts of materials. There are, however, broadly speaking, two kinds of artificial decoys, viz., those which purport to represent, more or less faithfully, wild birds in all their proportions, and the silhouette decoys, so called because they are flat, and merely represent the profile appearance of the birds. These silhouette decoys answer tolerably well now and then, and, as they can be packed up easily, and even in large numbers take up but little room, they are not to be despised; but on water they answer indifferently, because when the wildfowl are overhead they cannot see the decoys—and that is just the time when they should see them.

In America silhouette decoys are pretty extensively used. In *Scribner's Monthly* for October, 1879, a very lively and illustrated description of crane shooting by their means will be found. Any material will do, cardboard or wood, and of course the decoys are painted.

Full-sized decoys are more complicated, and I append a description of how to make them, taken from Mr. Long's book on American wildfowl shooting:

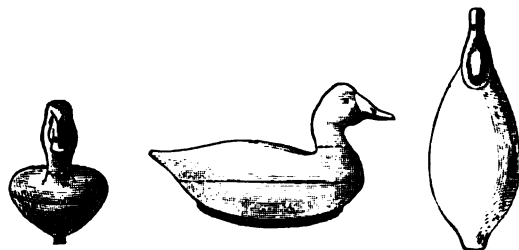
"One of the most important requisites to ensure success in wildfowl shooting, and more especially in the pursuit of the



deep-water varieties, is a suitable flock of decoys. They may be made in a multitude of ways, and of several different materials, each of which has its peculiar advantages, but at the same time its corresponding defects. The principal objects to be attained by all, however, are naturalness, or a sufficient resemblance to the species they are intended to represent, with the proper shape necessary to enable them to ride in an erect position during the heavy blows they are often exposed to. This last desideratum is often partially, and, I might say, entirely overlooked in the desire to make the decoys as light as possible, and of such shape as to take least room in transportation. With such objects in view, would-be inventors have tried a variety of methods in making them, and, though certainly accomplishing their object in this respect, have failed most decidedly in the main thing needed. One of them gave us rubber decoys for the modest price of thirty dollars per dozen. They were hollow, with a tube attached, through which, when needed for use, they were to be inflated with the breath, which, being ejected by compression when ready for transportation, they could be packed in very little space. They would float remarkably light and airy, a property, though contrary to general supposition, not at all desirable, as causing them to roll sidewise in the least ripple, a motion the natural ducks never make, even in the roughest weather. A shot-hole ruined them, and as the rubber soon began to crack after but little usage in a hot sun, they soon proved a failure. Decoys of metal, too, were tried, both of copper and tin, made to be taken apart, and the several parts nested together for packing; these, besides being expensive, were proved to be comparatively no better than the rubber ones, for reasons very obvious to the knowing ones, but which "the greenies," who want everything new, could not see until they had paid their money to find out. Decoys made of wood (not the things one usually finds for sale in the gunshops, where they should be allowed to remain, but those constructed for use according to reason, and with a proper appreciation of the thing needed) are preferable to any others. Having had some little experience in their manufacture, as well as their use, and

having the satisfaction of seeing my own used as models by better hunters, I will describe them as I think they should be made; willing, at the same time, to yield due deference to the opinions of others.

My principal object has been to secure the best shape possible to prevent rolling, and to ensure, with least extra weight, an upright position at all times when in use. How I have endeavoured to do this will be better understood from the annexed cuts, representing outlines of the decoy, than by any explanation I could convey in words.



White cedar and soft pine are undoubtedly the best woods for decoys, on account both of their extreme lightness and ease of cutting. Pine, perhaps, is better for heads, being less easily broken, while cedar is the most durable. The timber should be well seasoned and free from knots and sap. For ducks, two by six inches is the proper size, but for geese larger timber is needed.

The timber, being planed on one side and sawed in proper lengths, is next cut around on its edge, according to a pattern, representing a horizontal section of the decoy intended. Two pieces are needed for each decoy, which must be gouged out to the proper thickness, thus making the decoy hollow. The head (which has been previously shaped) is fitted and fastened to the top part by a screw from beneath, and the two parts, being roughly hewn into shape in conformation with a side pattern, are, after being nicely fitted, glued or otherwise cemented firmly together, and the decoy rounded and finished smooth. After being thoroughly sandpapered, it should be wet slightly all over so as to raise the grain of the wood,

and when dry should be again sandpapered. If the decoy be washed over with a thin dressing of shellac, it will prove much more impervious to water. This should be done before painting, and no varnish should be put on afterwards, as it makes the decoy too glaring when in the sun. When thoroughly smooth, a heavy coat of priming should be put on, of some neutral tint that will not show too plainly through the colouring coat, all of which should be mixed with raw oil and without an artificial drier. The priming should be allowed to harden thoroughly before the colours are put on. No priming is used on many of the decoys for sale in the gun shops; consequently, they soon become water soaked and heavy, and the colours indistinct. Artists' tube colours should be used, being more lively and durable than common paint, and costing but little more; and the nearer the painting resembles the colouring of the natural duck the better. A small brass wire staple or piece of leather is to be fastened to the lower part of the breast to attach the line to. A piece of lead, about four ounces in weight, formed as shown in the figure, should next be screwed on to the bottom, lengthwise, like a keel, and the decoy is complete.

For shoalwater duck shooting, flat-bottomed hollow decoys of two and a half inches in thickness answer fully as well, as the water is seldom rough. Each decoy should be provided with a separate line and anchor, which last should be of lead, if convenient, as it is less liable to scratch the paint from decoys than anything else. This need never exceed four ounces weight. The line should be what is known as "sixteen thread" seine twine, about one-tenth inch thick, of a length adapted to the depth of water, and attached to the staple or leather in the breast of the decoy. Instead of winding the line round the neck of the decoy, as is often done, the proper way is to wind it tightly round the middle, which may be done in much less time, an item of importance when taking up decoys in a heavy wind. And in setting them out again, instead of unwinding them turn by turn, the decoy should be taken by the head in one hand and the lead thrown with the other to the place desired, the turns coming off towards the

tail as the lead is thrown. A large flock of decoys may be set out in this way in a remarkably short time.

In this connection it will, I think, be well to give a few directions as to the management of the boat when taking up decoys in a heavy "blow." If you remain in the stern, you will find it very hard to keep your boat head to wind; when stooping to pick up your decoys it will whirl round, and you will have some work to turn it round again. Therefore, stand in the bow, with your knees braced against the bulkhead or sides of the boat, and paddle bow first as usual. By so doing the boat will never of itself turn the wrong way, and you may pick up your decoys in a short time and with comparatively little labour, when it would be impossible in the manner first mentioned. Always pick up your leeward-most decoys first, and, just before stooping to grasp each one, give the boat an extra stroke ahead to keep up its headway whilst winding the line. If you erroneously commence at the windward side of the flock, many of the lines will invariably become entangled in winding up, when those of the windward decoys must often be pulled over those nearest to leeward; and in the event of the boat's drifting back upon them and bunching them together, as will unavoidably occur if the decoys are placed as closely together as they should be, before the snarled lines are separated and wound up the boat may have been blown to leeward many yards, occasioning hard pulling to bring back again, besides the confusion it has made. A favourite mode of making decoys with some of the old sea-coast "gunners" of my acquaintance (though I never thought much of it, and have never seen such used in the western country) was simply to cut them *in outline* of inch boards. These were fastened one at either end to short boards, termed floaters, about two feet long and six inches in width, by pins inserted in holes bored in the under edges of the decoys, which, being loose, left them free to turn sidewise with the action of the wind and waves. The anchor-line was fastened to the centre of the floater; and when not in use the decoys could be lifted from the pins and be packed in comparatively little space. They seemed to work first-rate, especially in coot

shooting, though I would much prefer the full-sized hollow decoy, notwithstanding the additional packing room required. One *special* advantage they undoubtedly possessed—that of being easily and quickly made.

Another, and perhaps the best, decoy for coot shooting is as follows: A piece of pine board (or cork is better if procurable) is shaped for the bottom of the decoy, and to this is nailed, at right angles and lengthwise, another piece of board, cut to represent a vertical section of that portion of the decoy above water, the under edge being left straight to fit the bottom piece; pieces of flat barrel hoops, or similar elastic material, are now bent over the top crosswise, and fastened to the bottom board about three to four inches apart by tacking, thus forming a framework for the decoy. This is now to be covered strongly with strong cotton cloth, and the edges pinned securely; the head, which is made of wood, being fastened in proper position on the edge of the vertical board, and the decoy, after being painted and thus rendered perfectly water proof, is complete. Ballast, however, is usually added to keep them erect in rough weather. These decoys are generally made three or four times the size of the natural duck for greater show, and are a great advantage over the life-sized wooden ones on this account, coot being uncommonly foolish ducks, so much so, that "silly as a coot" has become a frequent expression of the coast gunners when speaking of a light-headed or tipsy person. This pattern of decoys I would not recommend for western gunners, unless it be for goose shooting, as they are too large and clumsy for convenience in carrying.

A few years ago a man named T. H. Snow (if I remember the name correctly) got out a patent for a flapping decoy. A board, which served as a floater, had a hole cut through it the size of the decoy, and in this the decoy (which was made like any common wooden one) was placed and fastened to the board by pins running into its sides, and serving as hinges upon which the decoy tilted easily. Wings, formed of wire, and covered with cloth or other similar substance, were hinged in position, and the decoy anchored in the usual

manner. A line leading to the blind was so fastened to the decoy that upon its being pulled, the forward end was raised upon the hinges to a nearly erect position, similar to that of the live duck when flapping its wings; and the wings were elevated at right angles with the body. It was quite an ingenious contrivance, and helped considerably to attract attention to the decoys, especially on dark, calm days. On such days, if a string be tied to a common decoy by pulling it a ripple is occasioned or a motion made among the decoys, which will prove of considerable advantage. A short whistle or noise of any kind sufficiently loud for the ducks to hear without alarming them, may direct their attention towards the decoys, and so prove the means of turning them; but for such ducks as may be called readily, of course an imitation of their call note is better.

Thirty decoys, at least, are needed for canvas-back shooting, and as many as two hundred and fifty are often used—the more the better. For mallard shooting, twenty wooden ones are sufficient to carry, as dead ones may be stuck up at any time. Though a few canvas-back may properly be used with mallard decoys, in mallard or red-head shooting to increase the show of the flock, it is seldom, or I may almost say never, desirable or advantageous to use the mallard decoys for canvas-back, as they do not feed together and have no desire to associate. For western duck shooting but three, or at most four, different varieties of duck decoys are needed, all other ducks decoying to some one of these kinds as well as to their own. Mallard and canvas-back are the kinds most required, while red-head and blue-bill decoys may be advantageously used. And here I will endeavour to arrange the decoys as needed for the different varieties.

For Mallard—mallard decoys: a few red-head and canvas-back beneficial if the flock is small, and especially on overflowed prairies.

For Canvas-back—canvas-back decoys: red-head and blue-bills added to any extent advantageously.

For Red-head—red-head decoys with mallard in shoal water, and canvas-back and blue-bills in deep water.

For Blue-bills—red-head and canvas-back decoys with blue-bills (blue-bills alone do not show well).

For Sprigtail Teal and Grey Ducks—mallard, or mallard and red-head decoys.

For Widgeon—Any or all kinds; mallard best, especially in shoal water.

Spoon-bills—mallard decoys.

Wood-duck—mallard decoys, though these do not decoy well to anything. Other small deep-water ducks, to deep-water decoys. When ducks desire to come into any particular place, any decoy may help to quiet their suspicions of danger, and would then be of advantage, though of little use in other places.

In canvas-back and other deep-water duck shooting, as it is often desirable to increase the show of the decoys, dead ducks may be fastened to them by a short line, allowing them to float some five or ten feet behind the decoy. The line should be fastened to the neck of the dead duck, which should be placed on its breast on the water. The fact of the heads not being in sight makes no material difference, this absence being probably considered by the live ones as due to the position of feeding. A small flock of decoys may be patched up in this way to make quite a creditable appearance. In cold weather, when there was no danger of the ducks being spoiled by keeping a few days, I used to often leave fifty or sixty, when I had them at night, covered up with leaves and brush, near my shooting place, to use for decoys next day, and these, with the wooden decoys I usually carried, were generally sufficient to allay all fears entertained by the suspicious ones.

Live tame ducks make, probably, the best decoys to be had for mallard and black-duck shooting; but they are such a nuisance to take care of and transport, that they are seldom used in the West. It would almost seem as though they took an especial delight in seeing their kindred killed, from the continuous calling and quacking they keep up whenever a flock of wild ones come in sight; and they seldom call in vain, for on the wild ones hearing them they immediately turn and

come in. The young wildfowler, when shooting over live decoys, should learn to imitate their notes as nearly as possible, an accomplishment which will prove of decided benefit to him when shooting without decoys, or over wooden ones.

It is often a great advantage, when shooting over wooden decoys, to have a live duck to throw in the air when wild ones are approaching. She should be secured by a light, strong line, of from fifteen to twenty-five yards in length, to the blind, to prevent escape, and should be blind-folded by a hood drawn over the eyes; then, not being able to see how far she has to fall after being thrown up, she will spread her wings and allow herself to drop gradually with her wings extended, as is the usual manner with ducks when alighting. The attention of the other ducks being attracted towards the decoy by her motions, they come in without hesitation.\* In the absence of a live duck, dead ones may be thrown up to attract attention, but do not answer quite as well, as they fall too quickly; for this reason they should not be thrown too high, but rather in a nearly level direction.

When shooting teal or mallard in very shallow water with but few decoys, lumps of mud, pieces of bark, or bunches of brush of the proper size may be judiciously employed to deceive the ducks. They should be mixed with those decoys nearest the blind, but never outside the wooden ones. I have known ducks to decoy all day to a little rough patch of ground left bare by the melting of the ice along the main shore. Of course they would discover the mistake before alighting, but would dart near enough to afford quite fair shooting from a blind near by.

Rather a cruel method perhaps, but one attended with great success in wild-geese shooting, is, on securing a wing-broken one, to fasten it to a stake a short distance from the blind, when it will call most vociferously on seeing others approaching or passing by, who are almost certain to come if within hearing distance. Geese should be set up for decoys as fast as killed.

\* I would commend to American shooters the plan used by Dutch hutters, which plan is described at p. 387.—WILDFOWLER.



If shooting at an air-hole in the ice, stick their heads under their wings, and set them up near the edge of the hole.

An excellent decoy for swan shooting (they decoy very readily) is an old white shirt drawn over a bunch of brush, the sleeve being supported by a branch or stick in the proper position, forming the neck and head. A single one, if thus set out in their feeding or roosting ponds, will answer nearly as well as a dozen, but for travelling birds more are needed.

As to the position and shape necessary to arrange the decoys in respect to wind, I shall describe that in reference to battery shooting, under that head. For point-shooting from a blind on shore, or in the edge of the willows, from a boat, a few hints may be welcome.

With the *wind off shore* a very good way for shoal-water ducks is to set them out lengthwise with the shore, rather thinly scattered, immediately opposite the blind, and grouped together, as it were, in two separate flocks at either hand. The open space opposite the blind should not be more than ten to fifteen yards wide, with perhaps five or six decoys in it, and the main flocks about thirty yards from the blind, no decoy being more than fifty yards distant. By arranging them in this manner, the ducks are allowed to come in between the two flocks, and drop into the open space instead of alighting outside the flock, as they often do when the decoys are properly arranged. For deep-water ducks, three or four decoys as tolers may be set out to leeward, sometimes one hundred yards or more from the blind; but if so placed for the shoal-water varieties, they will frequently alight with them instead of coming on to the main flock.

With a *side wind*, the habit of the deep-water ducks is to alight with the middle or windward decoys, while the shoal-water varieties seldom pass over them, but usually alight with the more leeward ones; place your decoys accordingly.

But the success of decoy shooting often depends more on their position in reference to the sun, if it be shining, unobscured, than as regards the wind. This fact, I have often observed, is entirely overlooked by the majority of duck hunters. The position of the sun is seldom for a moment

thought of, and, if at all, only to avoid its shining in the face when shooting in the location of the decoys. There are so many things to be observed and considered in the selection of the position for blind and decoys, that no absolute rule can be adopted to fit all cases. Circumstances will not always allow of it; but, as a rule to be observed when conditions permit, remember to so place the decoys that *the sun may shine on that side of them from which the ducks approach*. They will thus attract attention, and be much more readily seen than if the shady side is presented. This is a secret of success in duck shooting understood by very few amateurs, but well worth knowing. A thorough knowledge of these little things marks the difference between the lucky man and the unlucky one. Many are the different rules given by the would-be-thought knowing ones as to the best time for shooting at ducks over decoys, the most common one being to "wait until they are just in the act of alighting, and then give it to 'em." Others, who understand plover shooting better than wildfowling, say, "Wait for them to double." These rules may do very well in their practice, but in mine I have always found the best time to shoot was not to be decided by rule. The numbers of ducks, their manner of approach, their species, and various actions, whether suspicious or otherwise, should influence the decision as to the proper time; and, as these conditions are constantly changing, no one rule will apply.

If single ducks or pairs come in, where is the need of waiting until they are ready to alight? They may see something to alarm them, and, instead of alighting, sheer off. Besides often losing them in this way, much time is lost in waiting; and perhaps others that might be coming arrive just in time to be frightened by the wild shots made at the retreating ones, and thus two chances are gone. No; just as soon as you are satisfied they are within easy killing distance, kill them if possible. How much better it looks to see a man kill his pair prettily when flying over or by his decoys than to wait until all headway is stopped, and then shoot as though at a sitting mark! If a small flock comes, watch to get two or three crossing, and as soon as you do, shoot; be ready at the same time

to use the second barrel. When a large flock comes in, if you are satisfied they will alight, let them do so, and wait until you get several in range, if possible, before firing, but never give a single duck the chance to get away, after his once coming within thirty-five yards, without doing the best you can to prevent him. Mud hens often cause the duck shooter considerable annoyance, especially in blue-bill shooting, as the ducks, instead of coming to the decoys, often dart down to and alight with them. They should always in such cases be driven out of the pond if possible.

A large bag (a coffee sack answers admirably) is the best thing to carry duck decoys in on land."

Here I would state that Mr. Long's excellent work (from which this and the next two chapters are extracts), is published by the Orange Judd Company, 245, Broadway, New York, and may be obtained in London from Messrs. Trübner & Co.

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## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### AMERICAN BLINDS.

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BLINDS are used everywhere for wildfowl shooting, but nowhere so extensively or so scientifically as in America. Here, a barrel sunk on the shore, or a few hurdles and twigs stuck round the shooter, are the extent of the wildfowler's ingenuity. In America all sorts of dodges are resorted to in that line, and I herewith append the chapter which deals with the subject in Mr. Long's book :—

“Though the principles of general procedure may often be the same in like varieties of wildfowl shooting, the different surroundings frequently necessitate the exercise of considerable ingenuity in the providing of proper ambush or blind, as all such hiding places are generally termed by wildfowlers. And, as it will save considerable labour to know how to set about it properly, I will devote a few lines to the subject. The first thing to be done before building your blind is to decide upon its most favourable location; and this decision must be governed by various conditions influencing the actions of the ducks, and which you must understand, as well as the habits of your game, before you can be sure of being right. When you enter a pond note how the ducks may be sitting, whether scattered promiscuously about it or grouped in some particular place. Where they are thickest they care most to be. On putting them up, note how they leave the pond; they will almost invariably return from that direction. They seldom take a roundabout course. Note the position of the

sun and time of day, remembering the sunny side of the pond is best for decoys. Note, also, the direction and force of the wind, and its probable influence on the ducks. From a proper consideration of these and other little items, not easily enumerated here, I will suppose its location determined. Now, if a natural blind can be found, such as an old tree top or roots, a bunch of bushes or such like, in a suitable position, it should, of course, be taken in preference to building a new one, as the ducks, accustomed to the object, have become familiar with it, and, having no suspicions of danger, do not hesitate to approach; but if such a blind is not to be had, your next course will be to decide upon the most suitable materials handy for building an artificial one, and these, with its shape, should be selected as nearly as possible in consonance with the nature of the surroundings, an improper selection exciting observation, and consequently suspicion. Take plenty of time, and build your blind well; make it look as natural as possible, and sufficiently large and impenetrable to sight to afford proper concealment. If the ducks are liable to approach from different directions, build it to inclose you completely. A half-built blind is a nuisance.

It is certainly laughable to see a greenhorn behind a blind such as he usually builds—a few bushes stuck up to dodge around—when, as often happens, a couple of flocks of ducks may be approaching at the same time from different directions. At first he tries to hide from both, but, giving that up as impossible, makes up his mind which of the flocks is of the most heedless disposition, or is coming most directly towards him, and so jumps to that side of his clump of bushes which affords most concealment from them. On looking over his shoulder an instant, however, his mind wavers, and, affecting his body, that, too, begins to waver, first to one side of the blind and then to the other, as the vacillations of the mind seem to prompt it. All his motions, however, only serve to attract the attention of the ducks, and they swerve by to either side far out of reach. He now deliberates awhile, and concludes his blind is not large enough. So he starts for the nearest timber or patch of bushes to cut more brush, watching

as he goes for the approach of the ducks. Just as he gets to the timber he sees a flock coming, and back he runs as fast as possible, perhaps through mud and slush, arriving at the blind as they go by, too wide of course by rods. Now he is sorry he left the blind, and remains fearful to leave, lest others may come; but upon their coming, and again disappointing him, he fully makes up his mind (if the ducks will only stay away long enough) to get more brush; does so, and finally succeeds in getting a half-decent blind built, about the time the ducks quit flying. If he has a dog to whistle to and bellow at, and to yank around the blind when ducks are approaching, it adds very materially to the entertainment in the eyes and ears of one who can appreciate it.

In high wild oats or flags, of course no building is required. The boat, if shooting from one, should be pushed into one of the thickest bunches, at right angles with the main line of flight. Then the tops of the stalks or flags are to be struck down and in towards the boat with an oar, covering as near as possible the bow and stern, and afterwards trimmed so as not to interfere with the swinging of the gun, and the blind is complete.

When two persons are hunting in company in a rice pond, it is well for one to take a stand on one of the large musk-rat houses nearly always to be found there, as by taking separate positions more shots are obtained. To build a blind in a rat house, a large one like a small hay stack should be selected, a hole dug in the middle with the hands and feet, and the edges then built higher with stalks of rice or flags. This makes an excellent blind, as the ducks, being accustomed to rat houses, take no especial notice of it. It is a favourite manoeuvre of greenhorns to crawl round the outside of rat houses, endeavouring to hide, and being liable to be kicked off upon firing. I have crawled about many a one thus in my early duck shooting days.

If the blind is to be built of small branches or bushes, they should be stuck up in the ground close together, smaller twigs entwined among them, and bunches of grass, weeds, rice, or flags scattered judiciously over and amongst them, to close all

large open spaces or thin places that the ducks might see through. If very large, bushy branches are used; they may be laid down crossing each other, with the tops turned outwards. The blinds should *never be built higher than the shoulders when in an erect position.*

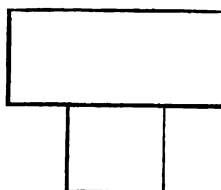
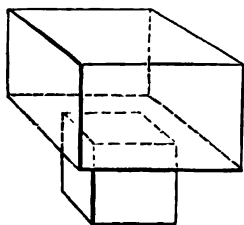
In cutting down a willow blind about a boat, as the common blinds are made in spring, considerable judgment is necessary. As the ponds are usually bordered with willows, it is generally easy to find a group growing in the position desired, the most favourable one being that where four trees grow as it were in the angles of a rectangular parallelogram, being apart in one direction the width of the boat, and in the other about three-fourths its length. If in such a position that the boat must be head on to the decoys, the boat should be placed between them, and the trees *felled towards the bow*, the cut ends allowed to remain on the stumps, the tops of the forward trees crossing each other on the bow, and the after-tops lying on the forward trunks. If the tops are not sufficiently leafy and dense, more branches must be cut from the neighbouring trees and placed upon them, and it will sometimes be necessary to tie these branches in position to prevent their being blown off. Should the trees grow the other way, *i.e.*, the long side of the parallelogram towards the decoys, they should be felled, *those on the same side of the boat towards each other*, and branches should be added and fastened. The new-cut ends of the trunks and stumps should always be covered with mud or grass to hide them from sight of the ducks. Should the forward trees be the proper distance apart, it is a good plan to wedge the boat between them, thus making it more steady and better to shoot from.

In blue-bill shooting upon the edges of overflowed prairies and cornfields, an excellent blind may be made by turning your boat upon its edge, and bracing it in that position by a stake or oar. They do not appear to be at all suspicious of it. For teal and golden-eyes this plan answers nearly as well, but mallard and canvas-back are generally shy of it.

In the winter, when the ground is covered with snow, a blind made of bleached cotton-cloth, fastened to stakes stuck

in the ground, affords a good concealment, and cannot be easily distinguished from the surrounding snow. A white handkerchief should be worn over the cap or hat. Great quantities of ducks are often killed in the air holes about freezing-up time. Long after the feeding ponds are entirely covered with ice the ducks remain feeding in the cornfields miles from the river, to which they return to roost at night in holes which they keep open during the severest weather by the warmth of their bodies, and by keeping the water constantly in motion. It is not unusual at such times to kill over a hundred during the day. One of the best blinds for this kind of sport is made of ice. It should be cut in cakes, the size of which should be proportioned to its thickness, and these should be placed on edge or end in the proper form. If the ice is thin, say three or four inches thick, and the day cold, shallow grooves should be cut in the bed ice, and the ends of the cakes placed therein. Water should then be poured about them, and the fine ice made in chopping packed in beside them, which will quickly cement together, holding the cakes firm and upright. Old ice or ice mixed with snow is the best, as new ice, if thin, is generally too transparent; but, if white cotton be hung inside the new ice, it makes the blind all that could be desired.

Another and perhaps the best blind that can be made for air-hole shooting is the sunken box—not the battery used for canvas-back shooting, but a deep box of pine, almost forty inches square on top and fifteen inches on the bottom. On account of the difficulties of sinking it, it should be as small as convenient, and the sides made tapering from top to bottom; or like the figures given below, which I



think is the better plan; the lower part being as deep as



from the knee to the sole of the foot, the upper part sufficiently deep to completely hide the body of the shooter when in a crouching position. To sink the box, a square hole, a trifle larger than the outside of the larger box, is cut in the ice where the box is intended to be placed, and the box then sunk to the desired depth by loading it sufficiently with water. It is now fastened in position to two stout poles, about twelve feet long, which have been previously pushed under the surrounding ice, one along either side, and touching the box. The water used in sinking is now bailed out again, and, after hiding the edges of the box with pieces of ice, it is ready for occupancy. When the ice is not sufficiently strong to hold down the empty box, this plan must be given up, and the box kept to the desired depth by stones or other heavy weights."

All these hints are so acceptable, and withal so spiritedly described, that I give them in their entirety, in Mr. Long's own words.

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## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### AMERICAN CANVAS-BACK SHOOTING.

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PERHAPS the most curious way of overreaching canvas-backs, is that called toling. Let us hear how Dr. Sharples describes the sport: "A spot is usually selected where the birds have not been much disturbed, and where they feed at three or four hundreds yards from, and can approach to within forty or fifty yards of, the shore, as they will never come nearer than they can swim freely. The higher the tides, and the calmer the day the better, for they feed closer to the shores, and see more distinctly. Most persons on these waters have a race of small white or liver-coloured dogs, which they familiarly call the toler breed, but which appear to be the ordinary poodle. These dogs are extremely playful, and are taught to run up and down the shore in sight of the ducks, either by the motion of the hand or by throwing chips from side to side. They soon become perfectly acquainted with their business, and, as they discover the ducks approaching them, make their jumps less high, till they almost crawl on the ground to prevent the birds discovering what the object of their curiosity may be. This disposition to examine rarities has been taken advantage of by using a red or black handkerchief by day and a white one by night in toling, or even by gently plashing the water on the shore. The nearest ducks soon notice the strange appearance, raise their heads, gaze intently for a moment, and then start for the shore, followed by the rest. On many occasions I have seen thousands of them swimming in a solid

mass direct to the object; and by removing the dog further into the grass, they have been brought to within fifteen feet of the bank. When they have approached to within thirty or forty yards, their curiosity is generally satisfied, and, after swimming up and down for a few seconds, they retrograde to their former station. The moment to shoot is while they present their sides, and forty or fifty ducks have often been killed by a small gun. The black-heads tole the most readily, then the red-heads, next the canvas-backs, and the bald-pates rarely. To prevent the dogs, whilst toling, from running in, they are not allowed to go into the water to bring out the ducks, but another breed of dogs, of the Newfoundland and water-spaniel mixture, are employed."

This plan is resorted to whenever the ground allows it to be carried out, but the most usual method of shooting canvas-backs in the West, according to Mr. Long, is by the aid of decoys, shooting either from a sink-box—a battery built of brush, &c., or a paddle-boat—or from a blind built in some favourable position along the edges of the willows. Mr. Long says: The "first-named plan is but little used, however, on account of the frequent difficulty of conveying it from one lake to another, part of the distance perhaps being through thick brush or willows, or across dry ridges. Then, it necessitates the services of two men to work it, and few more ducks can be killed from it than by other methods where each man may hunt separately.

"When ducks get bedded (*i.e.* in the habit of sitting in large bodies in the same place for purposes of feeding or otherwise) in the large open waters, and act shy of decoys placed near the shore, a common paddle-boat covered with brush and weeds answers nearly as well as the sink-box, and costs much less labour to prepare; and, when done with, the brush may be thrown off, and the labour of towing about the "sink" avoided. Some of my readers may wish to try the sink, however, so I will give a brief description of its build and the manner of using it.

"The box in which the shooter lies should be of pine, sides and bottom one inch and ends two inches thick, and of pro-

portions adapted to the sides of the person to occupy it; six feet long, two feet wide, and thirteen inches deep being proper for an ordinary sized man. Along each side and across the ends, one inch below the top edge of the box, two-by-four inch pine timbers are fastened, framed together to equal height, and extending on all sides two and a half feet from the box. This frame should be slanted off on top fully an inch towards the ends to give a pitch to the deck, and on the under side should also be reduced in the same manner to make it as light as possible for handling. The frame is next covered with a pine platform a half-inch thick, which is further strengthened by the addition of a brace reaching from the centre of the box on each side. This platform is bounded on the three sides by hinged wings of cotton-cloth, which are two feet wide, fastened to a pine framework, and so constructed as to admit of being folded back upon the platform when not in use. At the fourth side or head of the sink, the wing, instead of being made entirely of cloth, is partly composed of two half-inch pine woods, eight inches wide, hinged together, and extending the width of the platform, to which the inner board is fastened by strong hinges; the rest of the wing, which is equal in width to the others, is of cloth, and all the wings are joined together by angle-pieces of the same material. A border of sheet-lead, three inches in height, is to be tacked completely around the outside edge of the box, and inclined outwards, as the flare of a boat, to throw off any ripple that might otherwise wash into the box. Across the head, and about half-way round the sides, where the tendency of the water to wash in is always greatest, a second circular rim of lead four inches high, as a double precaution, should also be fastened and flared like the other. This outside rim should be placed about fifteen inches from the end of the box, a short rope, about six feet in length, is fastened at each end about three feet apart, to the cross-timber at the head of the box, to the middle of which rope the anchor-line is attached. A second anchor is also sometimes used, which should be fastened to the foot of the platform. This, however, except in very rare shallow water, is needless. To finish, the whole

thing is now to be painted as near the colour of the water as possible, and when dry is ready for use.

"A bed of hay or straw is prepared in the bottom, on which the shooter is to lie, a pillow placed at the end for his head, and the sink is next towed out and anchored in the desired position. The decoys are next set out, the guns and ammunition transferred from the paddle-boat, and, after adding sufficient ballast with the weight of the shooter to sink the edge of the platform to the surface of the water, the shooter takes his place, and his companion leaves him. The companion's duty now is to rout up the ducks occasionally when they get settled, to secure the cripples if possible, to pick up the dead, and to release the shooter when necessary. (Sometimes there are two shooters in the sink, as shown in the illustration on opposite page.)

"From the position of the shooter it is evident he can only shoot in very limited directions; the decoys must therefore be so arranged that ducks coming to them will approach in such a manner as shall be most favourable to his condition for shooting. The arrangement fulfilling this requirement most perfectly is as follows:—Not less than one hundred decoys should be used, placed square to the right fifteen yards, to the left twenty-five yards, from this line narrowing gradually to a point about ten yards to the left of a direct line to leeward, and at a distance of thirty-five yards from the sink; from this point, three or four tolers, ten to fifteen yards apart, to leeward, and inclined towards the direction the ducks mainly approach from or pass by. Near the centre of this triangle, which is the figure the flock now represents, the decoys should be scattered a trifle more than at other places, and the ducks will endeavour to alight there. A few decoys should be fastened to the platform of the sink.

"This arrangement of the decoys is the one most suitable for sink-box shooting. No matter on which side ducks may be, when they observe the decoys they almost invariably approach to alight against the wind, if it be blowing at all; and as the decoys are now placed they will come in over or very close to the leeward point of the triangle, because in so approaching



AN AMERICAN SINK.



that point is nearest to them, and they seldom take a round-about course without a reason for it. More decoys are set to the left of the sink, because it is much easier for the shooter to swing his gun on that side than towards the right, as he might be obliged to do if there were equal numbers on each side, when the ducks would be as likely to turn one way as the other. If during the day, the wind should change, it will be necessary to alter the position of the battery. This may be done without taking up the decoys, if they are arranged as directed, all that is necessary being to shift the box to windward.

“When ducks are flying by, especially in very calm days, a good way to attract their attention to the decoys is to raise your hands above the edges of the box, and wave them quickly to and fro, imitating as near as may be the action of ducks when flapping their wings or when alighting on the water. This turning involuntarily the eyes of the passing ducks towards the decoys, they come in readily. The shooter should be careful not to rise up too soon when ducks are approaching. Wait until they are over the “tail” decoys, and if there is a large flock, and they choose to alight, let them do so, and when you catch a sufficient number together rise and fire quickly. A second gun often adds considerably to the score if the shooter can handle it rapidly. A strap fastened across the top of one or both feet, will help him in rising.

“The method of shooting canvas-back from the paddle-boat covered with brush is so similar to sink-box shooting, that it would simply be a waste of space to describe it, and the covering of the boat is so simple a matter that I will trust to the ingenuity of my readers without boring them with tedious explanations. I will just remark the position of shooting from the paddle-boat had better be from the knees than from a sitting position, bending forward when ducks may be approaching, instead of lying at length.”

This graphic description from Mr. Long's book, together with the illustration thereto appended, will, I trust, enable my readers to grasp the subject thoroughly.

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## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### SHORE SHOOTING.

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It must not be imagined that the shore shooter bags only shore birds. If a man understands his business, and lives near some estuary where punting is pretty extensively carried on, he has only to visit the shores early in the morning, and if the punters have fired more or less heavily during the night, he is sure to find not only dead birds on the lee-shore who have drifted ashore—being blown there by the wind, or been taken there by the tide, or who had paddled ashore and eventually died there; but also a lot of lively “cripples,” which will tax his patience and his skill to bring to bag. A good dog then is absolutely necessary, and by a good dog I mean not only one that knows how to stick to heel until told—a *sine quâ non*, this—but also one that, once told to go on, means business, and will not come back without the bird, be the difficulties in the way ever so great, short of insurmountable. Now, it takes a deal of pluck in any dog to satisfactorily perform that part of his duties. The birds dive like loons, cling to weeds at the bottom, hide under banks or in holes in the mud, and so on; therefore the dog must not only be patient and clever, but he must have a good nose, and have sense.

Ay, sense. There are amongst dogs, as amongst men, specimens which have sense, and specimens which have not. Some will be “canny,” and others will be the greatest idiots on the face of the earth. Now the latter sort will not do, on

any terms, for shore shooting. To begin with, the temptation to "run in" when shore shooting, are numerous, since the dog sees the birds before they are fired at, and after they are knocked over, almost throughout the tramping expedition. Hence, a good shore dog requires extra schooling, and I have found, from experience, that the best thing one can do to prepare a young dog for that sort of work is, strange as it may appear, to have him broken in a well-stocked hare country. Yes; the moment a puppy will look with equanimity upon many hares scampering about, he will readily and kindly take to seeing shore birds stalking about within his sight, and "calling" within his hearing. But, unless a dog has been so trained, it is perfectly useless to bring him to the shore, as he is sure to upset all your plans; because, as I have already said, the temptations which are sure to be thrown in his way are bound to prove too much for his nerves. Say, for instance, you have winged a curlew. Well, down comes the bird, and up he gets on his long legs and starts off most promiscuously on the bare sands or saltings, yelling "ten million murders," and flapping his wings all the time. Now the dog may stand his running, but the yelling and flapping are sure to "fetch him," and off he goes—and he is spoiled for the time being—which is most aggravating, particularly if a "passage" happens to be on, when you should make the most of it, and can't, on account of your now unruly customer. Again, as regards the retrieving itself, it should be perfection in every way. The dog must be tender-mouthed, otherwise he would spoil your birds; and if you wanted some of them to be stuffed, of course that would be impossible. Then he must not play with his birds. Now curlews, for instance, when they are mouthed are apt to turn round and hit at the dog with their long bills. True, these bills are not particularly hard or sharp; but if the dog is nervous he is pretty sure to drop the bird, put one of his paws on it and bite it, and so on. Or again, it frequently occurs that a bird falls beyond one or two creeks. Now, in such a case, a good many dogs adopt the following exhilarating dodge, viz.: they cross the creek, or creeks, all right, and nail the bird properly; but in the vast majority of cases when they

have done that much, they are apt to drop the bird on the off-shore and swim back without it—which is very aggravating—and that sort of dog requires a good deal of coaxing before he will satisfactorily perform his duty. I have seen a good many dogs acting thus; they would retrieve well from water, but if they had to carry from land to water and across this water to land again they were bound to bungle. The dog must also be young and quick-sighted and good-nosed, because in a gale of wind the birds, if only hit, manage to break their fall for a considerable distance; and unless the dog can keep his eye on them, swim vigorously in the direction, and have the sense to go down wind, so as to scent his birds, he will lose them, especially if there are any waves or wavelets about, as these will interfere with his having a good view of what may be floating on the water. *Ergo*, he must use his nose, then. Indeed, he must do so at all times, and one can always tell a novice at that game when one sees a dog swimming heartily towards some *flotsam*, such as a piece of cork, or wood, or a basket drifting about on the tide, and actually laying hold of it when he was looking for a bird. The experienced dog makes no such mistake unless he is up wind, when by chance he may be deceived by the appearance of the drifting object, but if he has the wind in his favour he never mounths anything but birds, and that is as it should be. I have often laughed till I cried almost, at seeing some fellow's dog persisting in bringing ashore an old hamper, a bit of spar, a large piece of cork, &c., whilst the dead or winged birds were drifting or swimming away desperately, and the shooter was invoking blessings loud and deep on his dog's head.

A shore-shooter's dog should be liver-coloured, the "rustier" the better. He should be of good size, but not too large. A dog that can retrieve a wild goose will do. If one has, now and then, to get him to retrieve a swan, why, he will drag it ashore well enough if he cannot carry it; but to choose a very large dog because, forsooth, he might have some day to retrieve a swan, is a mistake. To begin with, no dog can mouth a swan. He can but seize it by the neck, which is the best plan if the bird is only crippled, or by a wing if he is dead, and

drag it along, either at sea, or on the saltings, or the sands; but to *carry* a swan is more than any ordinary retriever can do. Therefore, a good, medium-sized dog is best for all-round work. A small-sized dog should be eschewed, except he is used, as in America, as a toler, when, then, the smaller he is the better, indeed, a regular "piper" would be then just the thing; but such a dog could not do the retrieving, his size, materially, would handicap him too severely against any strong "cripples," and as I am here only treating of a shore-shooter's retriever, such decoy dogs do not pertain to the class I am alluding to.

Now, as to the colour, I repeat it, liver is the best, simply because the fowl do not seem to mind a liver-coloured dog as they do a black one. Just as a piper is chosen reddish or light liver-coloured because the fowl take him to be a fox or something of the sort, and, out of spite, follow him into the pipe, so even a bigger liver dog from a distance does not alarm the fowl.

At the same time, some black dogs are used also very extensively; but it stands to reason that a black dog seen running on the sands or saltings must attract the bird's attention, and magnify their distrust, which is, already, generally speaking, great enough, without needing any artificial increase. *Ergo*, taking two dogs of equal working merit, the liver-coloured one will be preferable for shore shooting. For field work, on the contrary, a black dog would always be best, because a liver-coloured one might not be readily distinguished, in covert for instance, and might, in consequence thereof, get peppered. Such things have occurred repeatedly.

Besides being good at retrieving, the shore shooter's dog must also be handy enough to be trusted with beating a reed bed now and then, and he should do so systematically—not jump, slap bang, into the middle, and put up the birds anyhow, but take the wind, and proceed carefully to hunt the fastness, and drive out whatever may be therein. From all this it will be seen that a good dog for shore shooting must be no "chicken."

I have seen various breeds of dogs used for the purpose—

Irish water spaniels, English water spaniels, and retrievers proper. The two latter breeds are the best for all-round work. The Irish water spaniel is too impetuous, headstrong, and hard-mouthed; he dashes here, there, and everywhere, and complicates his work by thoroughly giving warning to, and alarming his cripples. The English water spaniel which, by the way, was mostly liver-and-white, has a good nose, is clever, and generally tender-mouthed enough to retrieve even a jack snipe, alive. Retrievers, liver-coloured and black ones, when well broken, are to be depended upon, but they are apt to "sulk" if many birds are killed at one shot, in which case there is nothing that will more surely send them on again than firing the gun again, when the "sulky fit" will give way. At the same time the waste of ammunition which is thus entailed is not to be lost sight of, and the *ruse* is not either very conducive to further sport. Poodles are also used—but mostly abroad—for shore shooting, and they are very clever indeed. But I never saw a poodle used for shore shooting in the British kingdom.

I now come to dress. The shore shooter should not be overburdened with clothes, and he should not wear heavy boots for the self-evident reason that, as he has to walk generally over very heavy ground, he had better not hamper his motions with heavy clothing or heavy foot-coverings. I am very partial myself to homespun clothes for that sort of work; and if their colour is of a lightish brown all the better for the shooter's chances of success. As regards the boots, practically the shooter must not mind at all getting wet, indeed, he is bound to get his legs and feet wet. Therefore, virtually shoes answer as well as boots; and I have often gone on such expeditions with ordinary shooting shoes on. The sand shoes, so called, which are sold in sea-side towns, are absolutely useless, as the soles give way under the severe strain of a long day's hard shooting, and the cross-pieces of leather which come over the foot almost invariably raise blisters, particularly when the feet are wet. Therefore plain shoes, if shoes must be used, are far preferable. At the same time, the nature of the ground which is to be tramped over must be considered.

Sometimes the shore is sandy, and may be lined with sandy downs, wherein the shooter may find it expedient to hide now and then. In such a case shoes are very apt to get filled with sand, and are then very uncomfortable. Still, they can soon be taken off and cleared, and as they are very light to their wearers, they are preferred by many shore shooters, especially for summer sport; but in winter time, and when tramping over the saltings has to be performed, lace-up boots should always be resorted to. Some saltings "suck" so hard that they would certainly pull off one's shoes, particularly when they are thoroughly wet. I have more than once found myself thus barefooted; and of course that sort of thing almost always occurred when there were lots of birds about, and an opportunity for a good shot was at hand. Therefore, for all saltings, shooting boots are a *sine qua non*; and, when the saltings are very rotten, the shooter should have a pair of mud-shoes to strap on his boots. I have given a sketch and the dimensions of my mud-shoes (page 219), and Messrs. Silver, of 66 and 67, Cornhill, have now some on view, and are ready to make them to order. These mud-shoes are provided with straps and all necessary appliances, and, once they are securely strapped on, the shooter is practically master of the situation. There are, however, some softs which are so soft that even mud-shoes cannot take you safely over them. But such places are always well known and given a wide berth to. No man should go shore shooting at night near such spots, because in the dark he might miss his reckoning, and suddenly find himself landed in a bog.

The first thing a man must do who wishes to go shore shooting is to devote a day or two to the study of his future ground of action. I do not mean to say that he should take a walking-stick and leave his gun at home. No; he might take his gun, but sport, for the time being, should be a secondary consideration with him. If a shot turns up, well and good; but all his energies should be bent upon discovering the topography and idiosyncracies of the shore; where the creeks are situated; how many of them there are; which individual course they run; what shelter they may offer when needed; at

what parts they may be crossed with safety, and at which parts they are unsafe; how the tides run; in which direction the sea walls are projecting; how long it takes the tide to cover the saltings when the flow begins; the favourite feeding places of the birds, &c. Without all this information, which can be gained only by personal observation, no man can do justice even to a good shore; and, if luck favoured him, and he did make a bag, he might run into danger if he did not fully know at all times his whereabouts. Take, for instance, the saltings at Friestonshore, and thereabouts, for many miles. The shore there will be found to consist of saltings which adjoin the sea wall, and run parallel to it, for perhaps twenty miles or more. These saltings are cut about by innumerable creeks, more or less deep, and running more or less at a right angle to the sea wall. Below the saltings, the shore consists of mud and sand, sometimes mixed and sometimes separate, and that part of the shore is very flat. The consequence of this is, that when the tide recedes, the top of the saltings, which were until then covered by the brine, first reappear, then simultaneously the creeks empty themselves, and in a very short time, comparatively, the whole of the shore is bare, and therefore is eminently favourable for shore shooting. But it should be borne in mind, that just as the shore was quickly drained, so will it be as quickly overflowed again by the next tide. Indeed, the speed with which the flow rises is something astonishing; and unless a man makes tracks as soon as ever the flow begins, he would be exceedingly liable to be cut off from the sea wall. In a few minutes the lower part of the shore is under water, and imperceptibly the creeks get filled; so, unless one beats a hasty retreat, one is likely to be surrounded by water on all sides. But, if one has studied how the creeks stand, he knows which is the best way to follow, and accordingly may escape. Otherwise it would be either a case of swimming or drowning—both very unpleasant things. Anyhow, the necessity for knowing the topography of the saltings in its fullest details, is so apparent, that it needs little enlarging upon, and, of course, the tides must be equally as well studied, and one's plans should be made accordingly.

Thus, at Friestonshore, an early ebb tide is pretty certain to insure fair sport, especially if the wind is favourable, because the birds will flock to the saltings as soon as the tide recedes, and, in the midst of their evolutions, they are sure to offer fair shots. Moreover, the sportsman may follow the tide, which recedes for a considerable distance, and, provided he has a watch, and bears in mind the time at which the flow begins, and walks back then, he will be safe all day. Now, knowing that much, inspires great confidence in the shooter. But when one is uncertain about the time, the tide, and the configuration of the saltings, it makes one apprehensive, and spoils the fun.

Whilst I am on the subject of Friestonshore, I may as well give full details as to its capabilities in the shore-shooting line. There is an hotel there, which is kept by a man named Joseph Sewell and his wife. The hotel is within a few yards of the sea wall, from whence, of course, the saltings begin. Thus anyone staying at the hotel, can, by walking a few yards, enter the marsh, which, as I said before, extends for many miles on either side. Of course, as regards making a bag, a good deal depends on the state of the wind, and the season. Sometimes I have shot very many birds there, at other times the birds were wild, and I could kill but a few, although firing at many perhaps. But, anyhow, I do not remember ever having been shooting on that shore without having enjoyed myself thoroughly. Therefore, enthusiastic shore-shooters would do well to give the place a turn. By writing to Sewell, he will meet any intending sportsman at the Boston station, and drive them in his own trap to Frieston, some five miles distant from Boston. In spring and autumn, when the "passages" are on, some excellent sport is to be had, and doubtless if some arrangement were come to with the landlord, he could telegraph to intending shooters whenever it would be worth their while to run down.

Respecting the guns and ammunition to be used, a few words may not be out of place. To begin with, for long and continuous tramping, a double 12-bore would be found quite heavy enough; but, as in winter time for long-range shooting



large shot must be resorted to, a full-chambered gun is desirable. Such a gun will carry 1½ oz. of shot comfortably; and, for ordinary single-bird shooting, it is quite sufficient. Of course the gun must be full-choked in both barrels, as it is very rare indeed to have a near shot. Indeed, near shots occur only in two cases—firstly, when the shooter is hiding behind the sea wall, and the birds, being unaware of his presence, may sweep close to him at high tide; secondly, when tramping over the saltings some sandpipers, and now and then a bigger bird, may be put up singly from the creeks, but for every such case, hundreds of shots have to be fired at long range. Therefore a long-range gun is *the* gun for shore shooting. I had once a muzzle-loader cylinder-bored, by Joe Manton, and I transformed it into a long-range gun by using shot cartridges of my own making. I proceeded as follows: I had a piece of stick, on which I rolled strips of paper until the rolls got thick enough to enter easily into the barrels; I then stopped one end of those paper cylinders, poured a load of shot into each of them, stopped the other end by folding the paper over the shot, and my long-range cartridges were thus ready. I used to load the gun with an extra dose of powder, put a thick wad over the powder, and with the ramrod I gently pushed home on the top of the wad one of these cartridges; no wad was required over the cartridge. The effect of this trick was something prodigious. Now, with our full-choked breech-loaders, no such dodge need be resorted to, as anyone who has tried those guns with large shot at long ranges well knows.

Of course, I always use the Schultze powder. I began using it some years ago; I never had a misfire or mishap of any kind with it; it shoots evenly, it drives very hard, it gives less recoil and less smoke than the black; and, to all intents and purposes, I look upon it as "the powder of the future." Anyhow, for sporting purposes, I would not think of going back to the black for my own use on any terms.

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## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### FLIGHTING.

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PROPERLY speaking, there are four distinct kinds of fighting ; but, to the best of my knowledge, I have never seen but two mentioned by the authors I have read, and these two were : "fighting proper"—i.e., at twilight (morning or evening)—and "day fighting," in stormy weather, when the fowl cannot remain at peace at sea, and are therefore kept on the wing, more or less, throughout the day—when an ambush in their line of flight is generally very effective. But what about that "night fighting," which is so highly successful in some districts, when the tide and night suits ? Every author seems to have overlooked that, and yet I have many times enjoyed myself mightily at that game. As to the fourth kind of fighting, that at shore birds, when the summer and spring "passages" take place, it is also a vastly amusing sport for the two or three days that the "passages" last, as I can personally testify. There is, however, a difficulty in enjoying this last sort of fun ; in this way, that unless you live near the shore, or you have commissioned some one to let you know as soon as the first symptoms of the "passage" begin, you are apt to miss the cream of the entertainment. The best of the two passages is undoubtedly the summer one, inasmuch that the tribes are then not only complete, but the youngsters are slightly ignorant of the ticklish uses to which fowling-pieces are put ; and hence they are apt to get the worst of the game, which is certainly then all one-sided. In the spring, on the

contrary, the birds when they pass back are then veterans, who doubtless have had to stand fire more than once. Moreover, they are hardy and strong, having withstood the winter, and thus they are a fairly good match for many fowlers. For the summer passage a double 12 or 16 bore, loaded as usual, is quite sufficient, but in the spring hard-driving charges and larger guns will be found desirable. Of course there are exceptions. I have seen shore birds which were so tired and so hungry that they would strut about, feeding, within ten yards of me, and I was standing on the sands, without any shelter. In such cases virtually one might almost knock them over with a handful of pebbles. But such cases are rare, and, generally speaking, on their return journey, the birds are so thoroughly wide awake that it is desirable to be as well hidden as possible and well armed. A good ambush should be, therefore, prepared—a sunken tub, a large and deep box, a pit, or some other suitable blind being pre-arranged in the birds' line of flight, tremendous execution can be done. But, as I said before, the birds one shoots then are mostly shore birds—curlews, oyster-catchers, &c., and the sport, therefore, properly speaking, comes under the denomination of shore shooting. I have made wonderful bags under such circumstances myself. On the Belgian coast, some years ago, in a few hours' time, I literally loaded myself and my bag bearer to such an extent, with a variety of birds, that we could hardly walk back with them. But I will now deal exclusively with fighting proper, *i.e.*, at ducks, wigeon, &c.

Fighting proper consists in watching for and shooting wild-fowl, from a standpoint, in the twilight of both morning and evening. And to explain this to tyros, it should be stated that, invariably, at twilight in the evening, the birds fly from the sea or the broads to inland marshes and fens, and in the morning they leave the latter places for the former. And thus the game goes on, in such a manner that in some localities the same point behind a sea wall or a hedge, or in a creek, will answer for both morning and evening flights, the shooter having simply to change his side of the wall so as to be hidden from the birds, from whichever direction they come.

Generally, however, a little variation takes place, but not much, and a good fighting station is always well known and very eagerly sought after by professionals and amateurs, so much so that I know of some such favoured points where the stands are occupied for hours before fighting time, by expectant sportsmen, who wish to secure these stands for themselves.

At night the birds come in small numbers—five, six, rarely more than a dozen at a time—except under extraordinary circumstances. These trips go in the same direction, and spend the night together in the marshes feeding. During their rambles in the night they hear each other, and meet, and towards morning they generally assemble in a more or less large flock, or, if the extent of water is sufficiently large, in several flocks; and it frequently occurs that at twilight these flocks flight together on their way back to sea. Therefore, really one has a better chance to make a heavy bag at evening fighting time, since on every trip almost one may score. Whereas in the morning, if the birds pass in larger bulk, one has only one opportunity, or two or three at the utmost. On the other hand, as the numbers are then much larger, if the morning fighter is heavily armed, his total score possibly may beat that of the previous or following evening. In other words, I should say that for evening fighting, when the birds are in trips, a double 12-bore, full-chambered and full-choked, should answer well for an average man. Of course, a double 8-bore or double 10-bore would answer still better; but it should be borne in mind that there is no shooting in the world, where quickness and dexterity in handling one's weapon is more necessary than for fighting. Sometimes one may see the birds coming; and if there be a strong wind blowing, possibly they will pass near enough, in all conscience. I have seen some actually slipping by, not more than three or four yards above my head; but, generally speaking, the only notice one has of their coming is when they pass. And in the dim light of twilight, aiming is not only uncertain, but the birds are soon lost to view. Therefore the shooter should be remarkably sharp in delivering his fire, and it stands to reason

that he cannot do so if he is handicapped with a heavy weapon. This for evening fighting.

For morning fighting, if the shooter has noticed that the fowl pass by in two or three large flocks, he should carefully note their time, and watch for them with a strong heavy gun, either a double 8 or a single 4-bore. For one thing, he will have only one or two shots at large numbers of birds; therefore, lightness of weapon is not so desirable for handiness sake, and certainly the gun should carry a good dose of shot. At least that is my opinion.

When the weather is still, it is always very easy to hear when fowl are coming; but it is not always so easy to see them, because they then fly very high, and it frequently happens that flight after flight goes overhead, but the shooter cannot detect the birds although he can hear them, the light being bad. Anyhow, when the fowl fly so high, the shooter's gun must be a very hard-driving gun indeed.

It is a curious thing that the more comforts the shooter experiences from the weather, in other words, the more pleasant the outing, the smaller the bag he will make. When, on the contrary, everything seems to be against his remaining out-of-doors, the better are his chances to score. A gale of wind and a snow and sleet storm, with now and then a shower of hail—in short, a wild and boisterous twilight, are just the requisites for a good bag at fighting. Several times when I have been out thus engaged, it would have been perfectly impossible for anyone to have been standing on the sea walls, so irresistible was the wind. But then the ducks came so lovely, skimming over the water, and rising only just enough to clear the top of the walls. That is the time for birds if one likes, and it must not be imagined that the shooter experiences as much discomfort as might be supposed. I have never known of any place yet, however bare it might have appeared, where some shelter was not to be had. If the sea wall is not handy, a creek can easily be found; and, in short, with a little ingenuity, one can always be tolerably comfortable. As a general rule, the more boisterous the weather the lighter the weapon will be required,

for the reason that, if the ambush is properly chosen, the birds will, if anything, pass too near the shooter for comfortable shots.

The knack of killing at flighting is exceedingly simple, but it requires coolness and practice. Some men advise firing just after the bird has passed over your head. I don't. When I see them, I keep the gun up to the shoulder, pointing at them; and when I calculate that they will reach a point just above my head when my shot gets there, I pitch the gun in that direction and pull. It often occurs that the darkness beyond you is so great that you really cannot tell by sight whether the shot has told or not; and, therefore, if the bird was only slightly hit, the probabilities are that he will go on, and the shot is put down as a miss. But, if you have killed, you will hear a thud when the bird hits the ground; if he is winged, you will hear the swish of his wings when he falls, as well as the thud when he hits the mud. The reason why, in the first case, no swish is heard, is that the bird has collapsed, and falls down like a shot pouch; whereas, in the second place, the bird is breaking his fall, hence the noise. When I hear that sound I invariably send the dog on at once—especially if there be some water handy—being fully aware that in such a case the cripple might, and probably would, reach the water and escape. But in the case of a bird which falls dead, there is no occasion to hurry. It would be best to leave the bird alone, and keep your dog and yourself still.

One point I would very strongly recommend shooters to bear in mind, and that is, never to kneel down on any hard ground when firing a big gun. I have known two or three cases in which the knee-cap of the right leg was very severely abraded through the shooter having done so. As regards the use of night cards for aiming, I do not believe in them for flighting. They may do for a pot shot at anything sitting; but at flighting, a man who cannot kill without taking a deliberate aim is nowhere. And therefore a night card is worse than useless, because it continually gets in the way, and really answers the purpose of only bothering the shooter. I should not advise the shutting of one eye when firing.

Indeed, in the semi-darkness one requires both optics with a vengeance. I have often wished I had fifty eyes that I might keep them all open, so as to detect the wily customers. Indeed, even when one has knocked the birds over, it is a very difficult matter to find them, particularly if they are quite dead. One would hardly think, when looking at a duck or a widgeon hanging in a poulterer's shop, that such big birds could not readily be picked up when it is known where they fell. But, as a matter of fact, one will tumble over them for five minutes, and almost trample on them, in fact, without being able to see where they are. This may seem strange to some people, but let them try it. And that is why, whenever possible, I like to have a good retriever with me when fighting. Without a good dog the shooter loses many birds, however sharp and experienced he may be. And again, if there be some water for a considerable extent round the sportsman, unless he has a punt handy, or a dog to retrieve his cripples and dead birds, he will certainly lose at least three-fourths of his spoils. At the same time, unless the dog is perfectly broken, he is absolutely worse than useless. A dog that will rush up the bank or jump out of the creek, when he sees you shouldering your gun, is an abomination in my eyes. Still, absolute steadiness to heel should only be insisted upon in a qualified manner, in this way: that if the dog actually hears a bird hitting the mud, I have no objection to his going at once, without waiting for orders. But it is only old dogs, veterans at the game, which can be trusted in such a delicate matter. Broadly speaking, I keep my retrievers to heel, and they must wait for orders under any circumstances. A snap of the fingers is a very good thing for a retriever to go on, and, if he is clever and has noticed where the birds fell, he will perform his work swiftly and well, as he would make straight for them the moment he is told to go. Of course sound alone can guide him as regards the direction in which to go, therefore a deaf dog is all at sea for fighting, however good his nose might be, because, if signalled to go, he would to a certainty flounder about the marsh, and waste a deal of time in his search.

One should never speak to a dog as long as the flight lasts. Nothing disturbs more birds than the human voice, therefore all work should be ordered by signs.

The dress most suitable for flighting is a rusty-coloured homespun ; but the shooter will always do well to wear waterproof boots and thick woollen socks. I should not advise a hood to be worn whilst the flight is actually taking place, because it prevents the shooter from having so good a notice of the approach of the birds. If it is raining or snowing, or hailing, a sou'-wester will be found exceedingly handy, as it will drive the wet down the shooter's back, and it will not interfere with his detecting by the noise the approach of the fowl. Of course in wet weather it will be desirable to have a waterproof overall ; and one thing I would strongly recommend then is the wearing of oilskin trousers over the boots. With these on, one's loins, and legs, and body are always warm and dry, and one may sit down on a wet bank, in wet grass, or in a creek and feel none the worse for it.

I need not remark that a rusty-coloured suit will be suitable only for open weather. When snow covers the ground, a white punting suit will then answer admirably, failing which I have known a night-shirt and a nightcap, slipped over the shooter's ordinary dress, to fulfil all the requirements most admirably. Some people even go the length of painting their gun-barrels white at such times. I have never done so for flighting, and cannot see the reason why, since the birds can only see the muzzle of my gun, and that is not much for them to go by.

In some places, where the immediate surroundings of the flighting points are mud flats, if the shooter has no dog he must have a pair of mud pattens. Mine, are, of course, the only ones which are worthy of the name, and I find they are immensely liked by all those who have tried them. In fact, I flatter myself that none could be better, ahem !

As regards guns, I should state that padded stocks should always be resorted to for any guns bigger than 10-bore. This pad inspires the shooter with confidence, as it effectually pro-



fects his shoulder and arm against the recoil of the heavy weapons. If a man were always to shoulder his gun properly, doubtless an ordinary heel-plate would not prove so objectionable. But then one does not always shoulder properly. It has often occurred to me that on the impulse of the moment, on catching sight of a bird, I have let fly at him in such a hurry that the gun was not fairly into the hollow of the arm; and the consequence was that I got the biceps muscle more or less bruised by the metal heel-plate. Now heel-pads obviate such inconvenience to a great extent.

The loading of guns for fighting should be calculated so as to produce the greatest amount of driving power. There is no occasion to get very many pellets into the birds, but what you want is weight in the pellet, so that it should be able to break a bone. For this reason I do not believe in shot smaller than No. 4 for first barrel when using a double 12-bore gun; and I have found that No. 2 in the next barrel is about the most satisfactory size. At the same time there is no gainsaying that, under certain circumstances, smaller shot will answer as well. But, had I my choice, I should certainly resort to comparatively large shot.

An extractor should be carried at all times. My shooting coats have, every one of them, a narrow pocket with a flap and a button purposely for my extractors. Nothing is more handy than this. At the same time, when fighting, it is to be hoped that no sticking of cartridges will occur, as a few seconds may probably lose the shooter a shot or two. Still, it is best to be prepared for every emergency.

On some parts of the coast fighting is carried on from tubs, which are sunk in the ground on the line of flight. Generally speaking, however, sea walls afford a sufficient screen for the shooter. Sometimes fighters anchor in a creek in a punt; but the shooting there is rarely as good, except in favoured localities. If the landscape is frozen over, four slabs of ice resting against each other make a very nice place of concealment. If the weather is open, the tide low, and the birds fighting along the channel, an excellent plan consists in carrying a couple of sheep hurdles and pitching them at an

angle on the saltings, as near the channel as possible. This done, and the hurdles covered over with seaweeds and grass, the shooter is completely hidden from the birds. In any case, whether in a tub or behind ice slabs, the top of the sink or blind should never reach higher than the armpits of the shooter when he stands up, so that he should have free scope in his motions.

As regards morning or evening flighting, opinions are divided amongst shooters, and personally I am myself undecided as to giving the preference to either. Certainly evening flighting is the most convenient as regards being at one's post in time. But when the flight is over, collecting one's birds in the dark, and going home then over very rough ground, is not particularly entertaining. On the other hand, for morning flighting one has generally to get up at some unearthly hour, so as to be enabled to reach the flighting stand in good time. And that getting up, washing, and having one's breakfast by candle or gaslight, is always, I think, an unmitigated nuisance. At the same time, when the morning flight is over, the fighter has the continually increasing light of day to help him in his search for his birds, and then he has the whole day before him to carry on some other sport if he chooses, day flighting, for instance, which answers exceedingly well if the estuary is suitable, and the weather boisterous. I cannot compare day-flighting to anything better than grouse driving, and I need not remark that both these last two sports are far easier than flighting proper, simply because the latter is carried on in such an uncertain light that the sportsman can very often see the birds only when they are actually over him. Day-flighting, when the birds are abundant, gives every chance of entertainment to the shooter, if his place of concealment is well managed. He can see the trips coming on one after the other a long way off, and can get ready for them accordingly. For such a sport the shooter should always be provided with plenty of ammunition, as sometimes hundreds of shots may be fired from one standpoint, whereas at flighting proper I have rarely known more than twenty cartridges being used, except at some particularly hot spots, and then when the moon had risen before twilight; so that, practically, the flighting time was

then greatly extended, lasting, say, for an hour or more, at intervals.

I now come to night fighting. This, when the moon is up and strong, is a sport which is carried on just before, at, and just after high tide, in some localities which are so disposed, that a sort of promontory divides two good feeding saltings. Let us suppose two such flats, A and B, and a strip of land between. When the tide rises and lifts the widgeon off their legs at A, they rise and sheer off to B, which they know is still bare. The night fighter, knowing this also, gets in position half an hour before high tide, and clips the birds on their passage to B. By-and-bye, when the tide will recede, some of the B fowl will come again to A, and then some of them again will be stopped on their way. The knack in this sort of sport is to listen very intently for the noise of wings and the calls or whistles of the birds; and, if there are a few white clouds flitting about, the fighter will see the birds fairly enough to give him a good chance to score, but on the bare sky the whole affair is a mere fluke. The birds generally rise very high in mild weather when clearing the sea walls, and therefore, for that sort of fun, I pin my faith to large bore guns and heavy loads. In fact, I do not remember ever having been in such an excursion with anything smaller than a 6-bore; and, now that breechloading 4-bores are built, they are my favourite weapons, and my cartridges are loaded with No. 2 or BB shot, according to the height at which the birds are passing. I need not remark that BB shot out of a 4-bore will fetch them down, even if they are well-nigh in the clouds; and I confess that a night excursion of that sort has for me irresistible charms. The weirdness of the scene; the loneliness of one's surroundings; the calls and cries of the birds; their continual evolutions around and overhead; the boom of the gun; and last, but not least, the sound of the fowl as they hit the mud dead or mortally wounded; all these things have for me a most powerful attraction, and I have spent many happy nights thus employed.

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## CHAPTER XL.

### CURIOUS WILDFOWL AND SEA-FOWL SHOOTING EXPEDIENTS.

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IN some parts of the country, twice a day at high tide, the shore birds repair to some neighbouring meadows or inland fields, and there they feed or wait until their instinct, which in this respect is simply extraordinary, tells them that the tide has sufficiently receded to allow of their returning to the sea-shore proper, for their usual feeding and gambols. This instinct of knowing the time of the tide is too remarkable to be passed over slightly. I have sometimes seen curlews *et hoc genus omne* many miles inland, but they never make a mistake, and as soon as the ebb was fairly started, off they went, back to the sea. Now, considering that the time of the tide varies every day, I think I am justified in drawing my readers' attention to that particular fact. This being now done I come again to the subject I had in view in the beginning of this chapter, which was to treat of the way in which to over-reach curlews under the aforesaid circumstances.

Now, anyone who has had to do much with country life will have noticed that wild birds of all species are so little alarmed at the presence near them of cattle or horses that they often go feeding right among them. Such a point was not likely to be lost sight of by wildfowl shooters, who forthwith originally enlisted the services of some horse or cow, which they had

trained to stand fire without much bother. Some horses, however, can never be brought to that sort of business. They are so exceedingly nervous that, although they may be going well enough as long as the stalk is proceeding, yet when they see that the gun is going to be brought into action, they start or even bolt, and if the shooter has secured the halter to his belt, or is holding it tight in his hand, an accident may occur. On the other hand, if he lets go, it is as likely as not that the horse will rush right among the birds and put them up himself, and, moreover, will go scampering all over the field in his attempts to prevent his master securing him again, and thus the opportunity for a shot would be lost. There have been, however, some stalking horses and cows, with more than local reputations, who were so perfectly trained to the business that, obeying the pressure of the shooter's hand on the off side, they would walk gently in any direction, grazed naturally as soon as a stoppage occurred, and did not mind the gun a bit whenever it was fired, standing still and waiting for the return of their master when he went to pick up his spoils. Such animals, which were generally too old to do any other work, were greatly prized by the fen-men for their services in that line. But, it stands to reason that it requires a good deal of practice to keep a stalking horse in perfect trim for his work. Therefore it was only in those districts where large numbers of birds were to be shot, that it was worth the while of the shooter to keep such a live coadjutor. It is self-evident that in those spots where but few birds turned up now and then at but rare intervals, the local men were at a disadvantage in respect of their appliances wherewith to overcome them, as compared with the regular fen-men. Hence, artificial stalking horses and cows were devised; and, indeed, many fen-men, who could not afford a live horse or cow, resorted to that means. At the same time, those live animals which were used for sport were not, as might be imagined, costly ones. Old horses, more or less deaf, and more or less blind, and unfit for any hard work, indeed probably fit only for the knacker, were generally the stamp which were resorted to. The shooter used to stand behind his shoulder, and urge him forward at a gentle pace

towards the birds, keeping him broadside on to them, and, of course, to their leeward, and, so to speak, tacking towards the birds until he got within range. This tacking business, however, was not always necessary, as sometimes the birds were so tame as to allow an almost direct approach. When the birds were fidgety, however, it became necessary to resort to various tactics, so as to make the whole affair appear as natural as possible, and the man had to be very careful, as regarded being well hidden behind the horse. This was the chief point. The next was to allow the horse to graze now and then whenever the birds appeared to be uneasy. This had a wonderful effect on them, the fact of the horse grazing seeming to inspire them with the utmost confidence. There were, however, some drawbacks in this style of doing things, as I have already pointed out, and one of the worst points was, that if by chance an old curlew came from behind and saw the shooter, he would give the tip straightway to the rest, and the whole lot sheered off. Now, with artificial stalking horses, such a thing cannot occur, and their advantages are palpable and many. But they must be properly constructed. For this reason I would not believe in an artificial horse or cow being worked by one man only, as the shooters do in Norway, for instance. There the man gets his legs into the hind legs of an imitation of a cow, and his head and shoulders are inside the concern, of course, the fore-legs being empty and dangling about. Thus, when the shooter wants to stalk a flock, he has to walk in a stooping posture so that the fore-legs should touch the ground, and everybody who has tried walking in that position will testify that it is a most uncomfortable one. Besides which, the Norwegian sportsman has to carry his gun alongside of him, and when he wants to fire he has to poke it through the head, which must confine and cripple his motions considerably. Besides, the whole affair must appear clumsy in the extreme, and if the birds will allow a man to over-reach them with such an unnatural-looking contrivance, they must be very tame indeed.

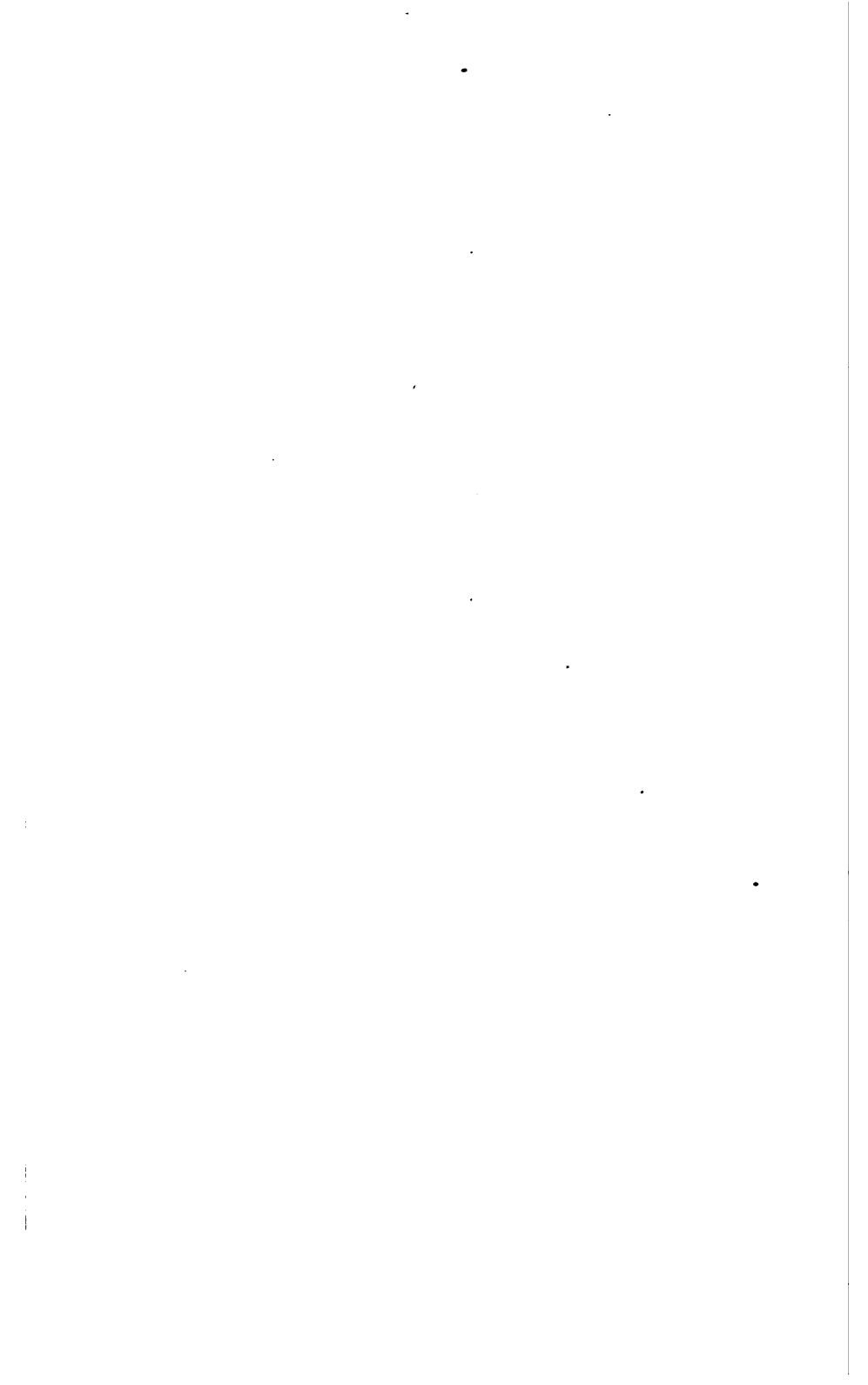
The artificial stalking horse is simply an imitation, more or less perfect, of a horse *in the act of grazing*. If a horse be

shown in any other position the stalk is bound to be unsuccessful, the birds apparently wondering what on earth the animal is up to with his head in the air as though scared. Whereas, if the head is near the ground, and the thing approaches slowly, it looks as though the animal was simply feeding, and nothing was in its neighbourhood to give it cause for alarm or investigation. Birds watch all these things very intently; so much so, that in ordinary shooting if, whilst a sportsman is stalking some birds from behind a hedge, he alarms any cattle that may be feeding, by suddenly popping his head near them, the birds are sure to notice the start which the cattle had, and they will bolt. Therefore, the imitation of a horse for stalking purposes should be made to resemble as near as possible an undisturbed animal peacefully grazing. To make an artificial horse (or cow), as the case may be, is exceedingly easy. I went once the length of having a regular horse's skin prepared for the purpose, but I would not advise that plan to be resorted to. The weight was not inconsiderable for one thing, but the main objection I had to the affair was its abominable smell. The best plan is to have a framework of wood, made to represent roughly a horse's body, head, and neck; then the whole should be covered over with some stout canvas, painted either bay or grey. A tail and a mane should be added, and the legs should be simply two pairs of trousers, of the same material and colour as the body of the horse. A couple of belts should be fitted inside to the framework, and the underneath part of the horse is quite open. To work it, then, two men have only to get in—one puts his legs into the dummy's forelegs, and the other into its hind legs; each one puts his belt over his shoulders, and the whole affair is ready. On the near side two apertures are prepared, and through these the shooters fire when they are near enough for a shot. The illustration opposite will show the whole affair perfectly clearly. I need not remark that before two men can fairly enter the field with such a stalking horse they must have practised with it previously to some extent, so as to be able to manage it without any difficulty when once in actual work. The knack they must acquire is to be able to walk together in unison.



DOUBLE-HANDED STALKING HORSE AT WORK.





On account of the apertures being on the left (the only side from which the shooters can conveniently fire), the men have to practise the tactics of going to the birds with the off-side of the horse turned towards them, and then when near them to turn round so as to be able to deliver their fire. At least, this was the way I and my companion had to manage it, our stalking horse being prepared as shown in the illustration. But, in order to obviate this inconvenience, it would be perfectly feasible to have a piece of canvas, fitting well each aperture, fixed inside at the bottom and hooking at the top. In this manner one could go towards the birds, with even the near side of the horse broadside on to them, and, when near enough for a shot, unhooking the sort of little curtain would enable the shooters to fire. It would always be best to have it hooking at the top, because, when unhooked, the whole of the flap would hang inside, out of the way of the shooter; whereas in any other style it would always be in his way.

Now anyone who has never tried such a dodge would be surprised at the facility with which the birds can be overreached by resorting to it. We repeatedly got within twenty yards of curlews; but the expedient should not be resorted to every day at the same spot, for I remember well that after we had given the birds a dusting for two or three days running in a certain meadow, the rest of the flock used to bolt, even when innocent cattle or horses came by. In short, the thing should be varied, and the *venue* changed as often as is convenient. Of course I am aware that, properly speaking, such a dodge is *not* sport; but it is good fun nevertheless, and when birds were so wary that no other means could bring us near them, it used to tickle us awfully to be able to do them in that manner. Another thing, one is not obliged to fire in the brown. The last trick we did was to have four sticks, one by the side of each leg, so as to keep the thing up, whether we were in or out, at all times; and once we were near the birds, we used to slip out on the off side, by simply stooping out of the concern and pick out our left and right with great gusto amongst the astonished bolting birds. This was excellent sport; rather ludicrous perhaps at first, but very entertaining

in the long run. I should add that spying holes are arranged in the canvas, so that the shooters can see on all sides, and can arrange their plans accordingly.

There is another dodge which is also frequently resorted to when shooting is carried on in a country interspersed by hedges, and that is what is called a stalking hut. The stalking hut is simply a sort of crinoline, under which a man hides himself, and which he carries along with him. According to the sort of ground on which the stalking hut is resorted to, its covering must be chosen. Thus, if there are lots of sedge or reed beds, and so on, or the meadows are inclosed with thick hedges, the hut should be covered over with reeds, sedge, or foliage. In short, it should be made to resemble its surrounding neighbourhood as closely as possible, and, when properly managed, its success is almost certain. I once got into one during a very severe frost. A lot of fowl were on the ice, and we could not get near them. I put on a pair of ice soles, and hid in a sedge hut, and I gradually managed to get within fair shot. Great caution should be exercised. The shooter should always keep to leeward of the birds most carefully, and he should proceed very noiselessly. Moreover, his motions should not be perceptible. Hence the bottom of the hut should be profusely provided with sedge, so as to hide the shooter's feet. An ice sledge, under the circumstances above referred to, would have answered as well, probably, but none was handy. Ashore, however, a stalking hut is alone possible, if no stalking horse is to be used; or, if it has already been used, when a change in the process is sure to deceive the birds again. The only difficulty in connection with the stalking hut consists in the fact that the gun has to be carried very carefully indeed, as there is but very little room to spare under the concern; so, if the shooter were careless, and carried his gun at full-cock, or committed some equally foolish imprudence, he might possibly kill himself. Indeed, this danger is twofold intensified in the double-handed stalking horse, since not only has the shooter to beware of his own gun, but the fact that his companion behind him has also a loaded gun, is enough to

make the leading man nervous, if he is not fully impressed with the reliability and coolness of his companion.

Shooting from a stalking hut is but poor work, as one can only take a pot shot at the birds by poking his gun-barrel through the foliage or reeds. Under special circumstances, however, and when no other means can be resorted to, the stalking hut, properly managed, will very generally answer.

I have referred in a former chapter to the way in which goose decoying is carried on in Ireland, so I need not refer to it here at full length. The leading features of the dodge, however, I may here mention, consist in, firstly, selecting a place where the geese are known to congregate for feeding, and there a large hole is dug, a large vat buried therein, and covered over carefully with turf, &c., but an aperture is carefully reserved for one of the shooters to watch the proceedings of the geese. Secondly, a lot of live geese are tethered about the vat, and some stuffed ones are stuck about here and there—the whole acting as decoys. The rest is very simple, as the wild birds unsuspectingly settle quite close, and get potted without any skill, especially if a man hidden some distance off has some ganders by his side, and throws them one by one, like carrier pigeons, to join any wild ones they may see in the clouds. The gander of course comes back to his companions near the vat, and thus entices the wild ones to come within shot. For firing the top of the vat is quietly slid back, and when the shooters are all ready they pop their heads and shoulders out, and the execution takes place.

Shooting ducks with a *réverbère* I have assisted at three times, at five or six years' interval. Twice on the river Somme, and once on the river Saone, near Vesoul. The full narrative of this last affair will be found in the third series of my "Shooting and Fishing Trips." The plan is simplicity itself, but it requires seeing to be thoroughly grasped. Roughly speaking, the requisites are, first, plenty of birds; secondly, a very dark night; and, thirdly, a very bright reflector. This reflector is a large copper vessel, which, on the Saone, was rigged on a spar, sticking forward on a punt, like a bowsprit. The copper vessel is placed so as to rest on its side and its

mouth faces forward. Inside is placed a small pan of congealed grease with a very large wick. When this wick is lighted, the *réverbère* is complete, and, from a distance, looks absolutely dazzling—like the rising sun, in fact. The greatest silence, I need not say, must be observed, as in all wildfowl shooting in fact, and the neighbourhood must also be absolutely peaceful, of course.

The boat is allowed to drift down the river towards those spots where ducks are known to be, and they swim towards the light. We got on very well indeed on that night.

On the river Somme the decoy man carried the copper pan on his breast, and he simply showed himself, slowly and gently, from behind a bank, to the astonished birds. In both cases, the men and shooters are behind the pan, in the dark, of course.

It is also stated that in some districts of France and Holland, birds are toled to the gun, as in America. It is possibly the fact; but I have never seen it done, although I have inquired about it. In Scotland and Holland, however, it is well known that huts on rafts are frequently resorted to for wildfowl shooting. The rafts are allowed to drift near the fowl, when great execution is done. In America a similar dodge is now and then practised; but the thing is improved upon by having a lot of wooden decoys stuck on poles, which protrude from the wooden island, and are hidden under water. I have never seen *that* done; but I have seen in Holland what is called a snipe raft. This is carried out during a very hard frost. The raft is made with a lot of weeds tied roughly together, and it is allowed to float within fifteen yards of a hut ashore. When the raft is ready, the Dutch fen-man brings up soft mud with a wooden scoop from the bottom of the pond, and he covers the said raft profusely with that mud. He then hides in his hut, and awaits events. The snipe hard pressed by hunger, and unable to find food anywhere, on account of their feeding grounds being frozen over, repair to that floating raft in shoals. The fen-man never fires at a single bird. He lets them all feed and search for worms, until he sees many

of them crowded together, when he fires into the thick, and sometimes kill twenty at a shot. This makes of the thing a paying game, doubtless; but, of course, there is no sport in it. The labour, however, is sometimes severe on the man, because if the frost is very hard, every hour or so he has to cover his raft with fresh mud, and this entails a very considerable amount of labour. The Dutch sportsmen, when everything else fails, often indulge in that sort of shooting, and by all accounts, when the wind is suitable, very large bags are now and then made.

Shooting plovers over decoys is too well-known an expedient to need a long description. The best decoys for plovers are a few stuffed birds called stales, and five or six live peewits (tied to a long string), which may be lifted off their feet now and then by the fowler. When this is done, the birds, wishing to recover their equilibrium, spread their wings and flutter so naturally, that the wild birds rarely fail to be taken in. Not only the gun, but snares and nets and bird calls are resorted to for the capture of plovers. The best shots occur especially at early dawn. The shooter, therefore, should be in his ambush and have everything ready, at least half an hour before dawn of day. The first signal he will have that the plovers are, or will soon be, on the move, will be the call of their sentry. This bird has been watching throughout the night, and at the first symptoms that a new day is at hand, he wakes up his companions. Then is the time for the fowler to exercise his wiles. When a net is used it frequently occurs that well-nigh the whole flock is caught; but it requires very careful working, because if the birds are hurried they may possibly go any way but the right one. In some parts of the fens the favourite plan was to have the net, which was a long, rectangular one, placed straight up by means of slender poles, right in front of the roosting flock. The fowler was carefully hidden near that net, and ready to let it fall. At the first call of the sentry the fenman's mates, who were in hiding in the opposite direction, showed themselves gently, and, gradually approaching, drove the birds towards the fowler. Then, when the flock was near enough,

they startled them suddenly, up went the birds right into the net, which was then allowed to drop, and many of them were caught. The beginning of March and the end of September were generally the epochs which were chosen for this sort of capture. Plovers decoy very readily, even to an artificial call. The best is that made with the leg-bone of a goat, and it is sold in most shops which profess to deal with bird calls.

In some districts where those birds abounded, the fen-men used to mark the spot where they went to roost, and drag a net over the flocks. They generally then used a lantern, which caused the birds to put up their heads and stare at the unwonted light, thus making the catch perfectly secure. Another plan for the capture of lapwings consisted in having a small island, all grass, and covered almost entirely by a net, which by means of two poles could be jerked suddenly from its position on the land to that on the opposite side in the water. Round the net, and just clearing it, some call birds were tethered, and the wild birds, when they had settled on the said island, were virtually stalking over the net. When a sufficient number of them were about, the fowler, from a distance, by means of a string, pulled the net right over, jerking the birds into the water, where he picked them up. I have never seen this done, and cannot say whether it is or is not practised up to the present day.

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## CHAPTER XLI.

### CURIOUS WILDFOWL AND SEA-FOWL SHOOTING EXPEDIENTS.—(*Continued.*)

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REFERRING to the reflector expedient which I have described, in some districts one man alone undertakes to carry out the affair; and in this case he places the reflector on a small post, and the pan of grease in front of it, having previously ascertained by trial how best to make the thing answer. He then waits for a very dark night, and, keeping himself carefully behind the reflector, he quietly lights the wicks, and awaits the result. Generally speaking, the ducks, on seeing the light, begin quacking and flapping their wings, just as they do at the rising of the sun; and the light exercising a very great fascination upon them, they swim towards it, when the shooter bides his time, and when he sees them close enough for a shot, and well crowded together, he pulls. Of course he uses for that sort of game the biggest gun he can buy, beg, borrow, or steal, and generally manages to make a tolerable bag. No more is to be done after a shot has been fired in the immediate neighbourhood of the shooter, who, if he wishes to have further sport, must go a long distance to find more fowl. This journeying in the dark across the fens is not always without its dangers.

I come now to Colonel Hawker's artificial island for curlews. This is so well known that it hardly requires a lengthened description. It consists simply of a small enclosure being made with wooden piles, brushwood, and so on, on some mud flats,



and mud being arranged to cover the whole extent of the island thus formed, in such a manner that when the marsh will be under water, the top of this muddy island will be alone above the briny. The result of this arrangement is easy to guess. At every high tide the artificial island is covered with shoals of birds, who find it then their only resting-place. This being so, the punter has only to come within range, and his load will sweep the surface of the island, cutting a regular lane amongst the serried ranks of the birds. This practice is always successful; even if the place be shot at every day, some birds will come to it. But it is always best to visit it only on alternate days, giving the place a whole day's rest between, by which means some of the birds which have been scared from it will, in time, regain their confidence, and visit the place, with or without strangers. Now, this expedient is very satisfactory when the shooter who goes to the trouble and expense of preparing the said island is the only shooter in the direct neighbourhood. But in any well-known and much frequented tidal rivers, whenever such a thing has been carried out, it has, of course, invariably been found out by all the shooters about the spot, and they therefore made it a point, whenever they could, to pay the artificial island a visit, so that the sportsman, who has had all the trouble and expense of rigging out the concern, finds himself, generally speaking, done out of the benefits which he ought to have had therefrom, and that, doubtless, must be very annoying. But, if lots of fowl are about, generally speaking the punters are dispersed all over the estuary, and, each one thinking that his neighbours will pay the favourite spot a visit at high tide, abstains, himself, from going there; so that it will often occur that a good bit of marsh, natural or artificial, is neglected for weeks at a time, everyone thinking that someone else was going there. But if the spot be at all on the road to the favourite grounds, it is invariably visited.

There is another bit of sport which should not be passed over, as it affords an immense deal of fun to shooters. I am alluding to shooting sea-fowl on or near the cliffs or rocks. The best way of managing this, if there be a breeze, is

undoubtedly to sail to the companies as they sit on the water, and put them up, each shooter taking his right and left as they rise. But it should never be neglected to have someone on the top of the cliffs, provided with the necessary appliances, so as to disturb the birds from the rocks, and not allow them to remain there. I remember once being one of such a party, and we found, having neglected that precaution, that after we had fired a score of shots or so, the whole of the seafowl had regained their fastnesses on the cliffs and rocks, and sat there placidly looking down upon us, far out of the range of any gun. This was very riling, as we had come sailing a considerable distance purposely for the fun of the thing.

Various expedients have been proposed in order to avoid this *contretemps*. Among these, having a man stationed at the top of the cliffs with a very long rope, at the end of which is tied a piece of wood, a stone, or a big bell, is a very good plan. The bell especially, if very loud, answering most admirably. But the man must be very careful how he walks along, for, should he miss his footing, he would certainly be dashed to pieces in his fall. And if there be any wind off land the thing might very easily occur. I have read and heard of several accidents, and therefore I should advise intending shooters to simply station a man, or even one or two of themselves, with a gun on the cliffs, with directions to fire as often as ever they can at birds if they have a chance, or without shot, if merely to frighten the birds into taking to their wings. In this case the man or shooters should walk as little as possible along the cliffs. They should simply station themselves in a good position, and remain there, blazing away, until they have driven all the birds out of that quarter. Then they might remove to another station and ensconce themselves safely therein, and carry on the same programme over again. By such means clouds of birds are always on the wing, and it is no small criterion of a man's skill and the driving powers of his gun, if, from the boats, he succeeds in knocking over his right and left with tolerable regularity.

These birds are excessively tough, and take a deal of killing. Moreover, they fly at a great pace, and to stop them

neatly at a goodish range, requires a great deal more practice than some men would credit. The bell dodge is not bad, barring the danger inherent to its execution. The astonishment of the puffins, razor-bills, and guillemots, at its tolling, is exceedingly ludicrous. They look towards the advancing noise with the utmost stupefaction, and rarely allow it to come nearer than a few yards; then they pitch themselves down, and sail away. Altogether the fun is tremendous. Thousands of shots can be fired if the day be propitious and, the waste of ammunition then, unless one picks his shots, is simply tremendous. I have seen, sometimes, four or five boats, with one or two shooters in each, engaged in the pursuit at the same time; I have known a thousand shots, at the very least, being fired in a few hours' time; and the total killed did not amount to more than a couple of hundred birds. Their down is grand, and is very much appreciated by housewives for bedding, pillows, and so on, and the men ashore eat the birds with delight. Therefore, their killing is anything but a waste, as some people would like to argue; and, the outing and fun are simply delightful. When going to begin the day's sport, the shooters will do very fairly if they get their boats anchored at the foot of the cliffs. But the craft should be at least fifty yards from the said cliffs, for the reason that it might occur that some of the stones displaced by the bell or pieces of wood, coming down from a great height, would, if they reached them, certainly stave in the boats, or kill some of those engaged in the sport. Indeed, the birds themselves, in their fright, sometimes displace some of those stones which are near the brink of the precipice. So altogether it is best to be on the safe side, and keep the cliffs at a respectable distance. (By the way, a "revolving stool," which will be described and illustrated hereafter, is just the thing to have in boats for that sort of shooting.)

Then, when the first battue of the cliffs (if I may so express myself) has taken place, it will be found that many of the birds have gone back again to the other end, where the operations had originally begun. But many will also be found in

small flocks, sitting on the sea in the neighbourhood. Therefore it would be desirable for the boats to go in chase of those flocks, by sailing or rowing to them, when very good fun will be had, as the birds dive like loons, and when rising give an excellent mark, as they flutter over the sea. Moreover this has the desired effect of sending many of the birds back again to the cliffs; and, therefore, when the bell or the shooter scours the rocks again, the sport will be increased by the arrival of these last comers. I have known some men who were so enthusiastic in the pursuit of that sport, that they would engage two or three men to lower them in a basket along the edge of the cliffs. This is carrying the love of sport a little too far, I think, for the rope constantly loosens stones in its friction against the cliffs, during the descent and ascent of the sportsman, who thus, whilst engaged in killing the birds, stands himself an uncommonly good chance of being knocked on the head by a heavy stone. He has therefore to be continually on the watch in that respect, and possibly this may lend enchantment to the pursuit. But I, personally, cannot see it in the same light, and I would rather be excused from any such proceeding. The basket generally spins around a good bit—enough to make anybody giddy—and altogether I think the plan is admissible enough for men who intend making a living by the sale of the proceeds of their shooting expedition; but for a gentleman who tries the sport for the fun of the thing, I really fail to understand why he should submit himself to such danger and hardships.

The best shot for puffins, razor-bills, guillemots, and similar quarry, is No. 4 in the first barrel and No. 2 in the second. But for cripples No. 6 will be found quite sufficient, as the boat will get sufficiently near them. The knack for lively divers is to wait until they just reappear, or to keep the gun up to shoulder when they are swimming away at a distance until they turn their heads. It must not be imagined that because one of these birds dives after a shot that he has been missed. Many of them dive with their last breath, and they are lifeless when they appear again. The best time for that sort of rock-bird shooting is at the end of July, when the young

ones are full fledged, and quite capable of taking care of themselves. There is no occasion to use a gun larger than 12-bore, because, for rock-bird shooting, one can always get sufficiently near; and I would insist upon single shots being picked, never allowing, on any terms, the firing of a gun into a flock. Therefore, to all intents and purposes, a 12-bore will be found just the sort of gun for that sort of sport, but it must be a hard-driving gun—that is the main point. As regards the enjoyment of the shooters, it is simply extreme. The novelty of the fun; the outing on the sea; the difficulties of many shots; the various incidents to which they give rise; and the vast number of birds continually on the wing, make of the affair an exceedingly attractive entertainment. I daresay some men will disagree with me, and, if so, we will agree to differ, for I certainly think the affair very amusing.

On the Rhine, one of the favourite plans consists in having a pit dug just deep enough to conceal the shooter in a sitting position. When he is in the pit, he draws a hurdle over his head, and rests it on a stone on the brink, thus managing an aperture through which to fire.

As regards traps and snares placed under water, for catching wildfowl, they are still used, but are very cruel, and therefore should be abandoned altogether. As regards falconry, it is here practically extinct. In India, it is said that the men wade in the water up to their necks, and, hiding their heads in calabashes, manage to secure the fowl by drawing them under water by their feet. This may possibly be the case, although the affair must be attended with considerable danger and uncertainty. In Switzerland, on Lake Geneva, grebes assemble at times in such large numbers as to warrant their being exclusively pursued by wildfowl shooters. The ordinary boats employed on the lake are resorted to, and the grebes are shot by means of a swivel gun rigged over the cabin tops in the usual manner. In the south of France, in the Landes, wildfowl shooters are mounted on stilts, with which they stalk all over the marshes. Slung on their back they carry a peculiar instrument for picking up their birds. This instrument is simply a light pole, at the end of which is fixed a

rough imitation of a human hand made of iron. When the shooter wants to pick up a bird, he unslings this apparatus, thrusts the crooked iron fingers under the bird, and thus is able to bring it to bag.

There are doubtless many other devices employed locally in various parts of the world, but they require hardly any description at my hands.

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## CHAPTER XLII.

### CLOSE TIME AND WILDFOWL AND SEA-FOWL ACTS.

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THE close season for wildfowl, where no alteration has been sanctioned by the Home Secretary in the case of Great Britain, or by the Lord-Lieutenant in the case of Ireland, is "*between the 15th of February and the 10th of July,*" and consequently it begins on the 16th of February and ends on the 9th of July. The counties and districts in which alterations in the close season have been authorised are, as far as I am aware, those in the following list, which I give with the dates inclusive :

Anglesey, March 1 to July 24.	Gloucester, March 1 to July 31.
Antrim, March 1 to Aug. 12.	* Hampshire, March 1 to Aug. 1.
Brecon, March 1 to Aug. 1.	Holland, Parts of (Lincolnshire)
Carnarvon, March 1 to Aug. 1.	March 31 to Aug. 31.
Cavan, March 1 to Aug. 12.	Huntingdon, March 1 to Aug. 1.
Cumberland, March 1 to Aug. 1.	* Kent, March 15 to Aug. 12.
Denbigh, March 15 to Aug. 10.	Kerry, March 1 to Aug. 12.
Devon, March 1 to Aug. 1.	Kildare, March 1 to Aug. 12.
Donegal, March 1 to Aug. 12.	Kirkcubright, March 1 to Aug. 1.
Dorset, Feb. 16 to Aug. 1.	Leitrim, March 1 to Aug. 12.
Down, March 1 to Aug. 12.	Londonderry, March 1 to Aug. 12.
Dublin, March 1 to Aug. 12.	Longford, March 1 to Aug. 12.
Dumfries, March 1 to Aug. 1.	Mayo, March 1 to Aug. 12.
Durham, March 1 to Aug. 1.	Merioneth, March 1 to July 24.
Ely, Isle of, March 1 to Aug. 1.	Monmouth, March 1 to Aug. 1.
* Essex, March 15 to Aug. 1.	* Norfolk, March 1 to July 10.
Flint, March 14 to Aug. 10.	Peterborough, Liberty of, March 1
Glamorgan, March 1 to Aug. 1.	to Aug. 1.

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Queen's County, March 1 to Aug. 12.

Ross, March 1 to July 20.

\* Somerset, March 1 to Aug. 12.

Suffolk—East and West, March 1 to July 24.

Sussex—Western Division, March 1 to Aug. 1; Liberty of Pevensey, Feb. 16. to Aug. 1.

Tipperary, March 1 to Aug. 12.

Tyrone, March 1 to Aug. 12.

Waterford, March 1 to Aug. 12.

Westmeath, March 1 to Aug. 12.

Wexford, March 1 to Aug. 12.

Wicklow, March 1 to Aug. 12.

Wigtown, March 15 to Aug. 1, except for wild geese, for which the dates are May 1 to Oct. 1.

Yorkshire—East and West Ridings, March 15 to Aug. 1; North Riding, March 1 to Aug. 1.

It is a great pity that these alterations are not made with some regard to uniformity. Even the dates selected are inclusive in some cases, but in others and in the Act itself they are not. I have marked with an asterisk (\*) the counties in which the dates are inclusive.

The birds included in the provisions of the Wildfowl Preservation Act are the different species of avocet, curlew, dotterel, dunbird, dunlin, godwit, greenshank, lapwing, mallard, oxbird, peewit, phalarope, plover, plover's-page, pochard, purr, redshank, reeve or ruff, sanderling, sand-piper, sealark, shoveller, snipe, spoonbill, stint, stone-curlew, stonehatch, summer-snipe, teal, thick-knee, whaup, whimbrel, widgeon, wild duck, wild goose, and woodcock.

The same birds which are included in the Wildfowl Act are also mentioned in the Wild Birds Act (35 & 36 Vict. c. 78); but the wildfowler need pay no attention to the latter Act.

The close season for sea birds is between the 1st of April and 1st of August, except where altered. The only alterations I know of are in Lancashire, Northumberland, and Yorkshire (North and East Ridings), where it is extended to the 1st of September.

The birds protected by this Act are the different species of auk, bonxie, Cornish chough, coulterneb, diver, eider duck, fulmar, gannet, grebe, guillemot, gull, kittiwake, loon, marrot, merganser, murre, oyster catcher, petrel, puffin, razor bill, scout, seamew, sea parrot, sea swallow, shear-water, shelldrake, skua, smew, solan goose, tarrock, tern, tystey, and willock. (The above was written in April 1880.)



As it may be desirable to have the Acts at hand, I append a full copy thereof.

32 & 33 Vict. c. 17. *An Act for the Preservation of Sea Birds.*  
[24th June, 1868.]

Whereas the sea birds of the United Kingdom have of late years greatly decreased in number ; it is expedient, therefore, to provide for their protection during the breeding season :

Be it enacted by the Queen's most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same :

1. That the words " sea birds " shall for all the purposes of this Act be deemed to include the different species of auk, bonxie, Cornish chough, coulterneb, diver, eider duck, fulmar, gannet, grebe, guillemot, gull, kittiwake, loon, marrot, merganser, murre, oyster catcher, petrel, puffin, razor-bill, scout, seamew, sea parrot, sea swallow, shearwater, shelldrake, skua, smew, solan goose, tarrock, tern, tystey, and willock. The word " sheriff " shall include steward and also sheriff substitute and steward substitute.

2. Any person who shall kill, wound, or attempt to kill or wound, or take any sea bird, or use any boat, gun, net, or other engine or instrument for the purpose of killing, wounding, or taking any sea bird, or shall have in his control or possession any sea bird recently killed, wounded, or taken, between the first day of April and the first day of August in any year, shall, on conviction of any such offence before any justice or justices of the peace in England or Ireland, or before the sheriff or any justice or justices of the peace in Scotland, forfeit and pay for every such sea bird so killed, wounded, or taken, or so in his possession, such sum of money not exceeding one pound as to the said justices or sheriff shall seem meet, together with the costs of the conviction ; provided always, that this section shall not apply where the said sea bird is a young bird unable to fly.

3. The Home Office as to Great Britain, and the Lord Lieutenant as to Ireland, may, upon application of the justices

in quarter sessions assembled of any county on the sea coast, extend or vary the time during which the killing, wounding, and taking of sea birds is prohibited by this Act; the extension or variation of such time by the Home Office shall be made by order under the hand of one of Her Majesty's Principal Secretaries of State; after the making of which order the penalties imposed by this Act shall in such county apply only to offences committed during the time specified in such order; and the extension of such time by the Lord Lieutenant shall be made by order to be published in the *Dublin Gazette*, and a copy of the *London Gazette* or *Dublin Gazette* containing such order shall be evidence of the same having been made.

4. Where any person shall be found offending against this Act, it shall be lawful for any person to require the person so offending to give his Christian name, surname, and place of abode; and in case the person offending shall, after being so required, refuse to give his real name or place of abode, or give an untrue name or place of abode, he shall be liable, on being convicted of any such offence before a justice of the peace or the sheriff, to forfeit and pay, in addition to the penalties imposed by section two, such sum of money, not exceeding two pounds, as to the convicting justice or sheriff shall seem meet, together with the costs of the conviction.

5. One moiety of every penalty or forfeiture under this Act shall go and be paid to the person who shall inform and prosecute for the same, and the other moiety shall, in England, be paid to some one of the overseers of the poor, or to some other officer (as the convicting justice or justices may direct), of the parish, township, or place in which the offence shall have been committed, to be by such overseer or officer paid over to the use of the general rate of the county, riding, or division in which such parish, township, or place shall be situate, whether the same shall or shall not contribute to such general rate; and, in Scotland, to the inspector of the poor of the parish in which the offence shall have been committed, to be by such inspector paid over to the use of the funds for the relief of the poor in such parish; and, if

recovered in Ireland, such penalty shall be applied according to the provisions of the Fines Act (Ireland), 1851, or any Act amending the same.

6. All offences mentioned in this Act, which shall be committed within the jurisdiction of the Admiralty, shall be deemed to be offences of the same nature and liable to the same punishments as if they had been committed upon any land in the United Kingdom, and may be dealt with, inquired of, tried, and determined in any county or place in the United Kingdom in which the offender shall be apprehended or be in custody, in the same manner, in all respects as if they had been actually committed in that county or place: and in any information or conviction for any such offence the offence may be averred to have been committed "on the high seas"; and in Scotland any offence committed against this Act on the sea coast, or at sea beyond the ordinary jurisdiction of any sheriff or justice of the peace, shall be held to have been committed in any county abutting on such sea coast, or adjoining such sea, and may be tried and punished accordingly.

7. Where any offence under this Act is committed in or upon any waters forming the boundary between any two counties, districts of quarter sessions or petty sessions, such offence may be prosecuted before any justice or justices of the peace or sheriff in either of such counties or districts.

8. The operation of this Act shall not extend to the island of Saint Kilda.

9. It shall be lawful for Her Majesty, by an Order of Council, where, on account of the necessities of the inhabitants of the more remote parts of the sea coasts of the United Kingdom, it shall appear desirable, from time to time to exempt any part or parts thereof from the operation of this Act; and every such order shall assign the limits of such part or parts aforesaid within which such exemption shall have effect.

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**35 & 36 Vict. c. 78.** *An Act for the Protection of certain Wild Birds during the Breeding Season.*—[10th August, 1872.]

Whereas it is expedient to provide for the protection of certain wild birds of the United Kingdom during the breeding season :

Be it enacted by the Queen's most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same :

1. That the words "wild bird" shall for all the purposes of this Act be deemed to include the words specified in the schedule to this Act; the word "sheriff" shall include steward and also sheriff substitute and steward substitute.

2. Any person who shall knowingly or with intent kill, wound, or take any wild bird, or shall expose or offer for sale any wild bird recently killed, wounded, or taken, between the fifteenth day of March and the first day of August in any year shall, on conviction of any such offence before any justice or justices of the peace in England or Ireland, or before the sheriff or any justice or justices of the peace in Scotland, for a first offence be reprimanded and discharged on payment of costs and summons, and for every subsequent offence forfeit and pay for every such wild bird so killed, wounded, or taken, or so exposed or offered for sale, such sum of money as including costs of conviction shall not exceed five shillings as to the said justice, justices, or sheriff shall seem meet, unless he shall prove to the satisfaction of the said justice, justices, or sheriff that the said wild bird was or were bought or received on or before the said fifteenth day of March, or of or from some person or persons residing out of the United Kingdom : Provided, nevertheless, that every summons issued under this Act shall specify the kind of wild bird in respect of which an offence has been committed, and that not more than one summons shall be issued for the same offence.

3. Where any person shall be found offending against this Act, it shall be lawful for any person to require the person so offending to give his christian name, surname, and place of abode, and in case the person offending shall, after being so required, refuse to give his real name or place of abode, or give

an untrue name or place of abode, he shall be liable, on being convicted of any such offence before a justice of the peace or the sheriff, to forfeit and pay, in addition to the penalties imposed by section two, such sum of money not exceeding ten shillings as to the convicting justice or sheriff shall seem meet.

4. All offences mentioned in this Act, which shall be committed within the jurisdiction of the Admiralty, shall be deemed to be offences of the same nature and liable to the same punishments as if they had been committed upon any land in the United Kingdom, and may be dealt with, inquired of, tried, and determined in any county or place in the United Kingdom, in which the offender shall be apprehended or be in custody, in the same manner in all respects as if they had been actually committed in that county or place; and in any information or conviction for any such offence, the offence may be averred to have been committed "on the high seas," and in Scotland any offence committed against this Act on the sea coast, or at sea beyond the ordinary jurisdiction of any sheriff or justice of the peace, shall be held to have been committed in any county abutting on such sea coast, or adjoining such sea, and may be tried and punished accordingly.

5. Where any offence under this Act is committed in or upon any waters forming the boundary between any two counties, districts of quarter sessions or petty sessions, such offence may be prosecuted before any justice or justices of the peace or sheriff in either of such counties or districts.

Schedule. — Avocet, bittern, blackcap, chiffchaff, coot, creeper, crossbill, cuckoo, curlew, dotterel, dunbird, dunlin, flycatcher, godwit, golden-crested wren, goldfinch, green-shank, hawfinch or grosbeak, hedge sparrow, kingfisher, land-rail, lapwing, mallard, martin, moor (or water) hen, nightingale, nightjar, nuthatch, owl, oxbird, peewit, phalarope, pipit, plover, ploverspage, pochard, purre, quail, redpoll, redshank, redstart, robin redbreast, ruff and reeve, sanderling, sand grouse, sandpiper, sealark, shoveller, siskin, snipe, spoonbill, stint, stonecurlew, stonechat, stonehatch, summer snipe, swallow, swan, swift, teal, thicknee, titmouse (long tailed),

titmouse (bearded), wagtail, warbler (Dartford), warbler (reed), warbler (sedge), whaup, wheatear, winchat, whimbrell, widgeon, woodcock, wild duck, woodlark, woodpecker, woodwren, wren, wryneck.

39 & 40 Vict. c. 29. *An Act for the Preservation of Wild Fowl.*  
[24th July, 1876.]

Whereas the wild fowl of the United Kingdom, forming a staple articles of food and commerce, have of late years greatly decreased in number by reason of their being inconsiderately slaughtered during the time that they have eggs and young; and whereas, owing to their marketable value, the protection accorded to them by the Act of the thirty-fifth and thirty-sixth years of the reign of Her present Majesty, chapter seventy-eight, intituled "An Act for the protection of certain wild birds during the breeding season," is insufficient; it is expedient therefore to provide for their further protection during the breeding season:

Be it enacted by the Queen's most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

1. The words "wildfowl" shall for all the purposes of this Act be deemed to include the different species of avocet, curlew, dotterel, dunbird, dunlin, godwit, greenshank, lapwing, mallard, oxbird, peewit, phalarope, plover, plover's-page, pochard, purr, redshank, reeve or ruff, sanderling, sandpiper, sealark, shoveller, snipe, spoonbill, stint, stone-curlew, stonehatch, summer-snipe, teal, thick-knee, whaup, whimbrel, widgeon, wild duck, wild goose, and woodcock; the word "sheriff" shall include steward and also sheriff substitute and steward substitute.

2. Any person who shall kill, wound, or attempt to kill or wound, or take any wild fowl, or use any boat, gun, net, or other engine or instrument for the purpose of killing, wounding, or taking any wild fowl, or shall have in his control or possession any wild fowl recently killed, wounded, or taken between the fifteenth day of February and the tenth day of

July in any year, shall, on conviction of any such offence before any justice or justices of the peace in England or Ireland, or before the sheriff or any justice or justices of the peace in Scotland, forfeit and pay for every such wild fowl so killed, wounded, or taken, or so in his possession, such sum of money not exceeding one pound as to the said justices or sheriff shall seem meet, together with the costs of the conviction.

3. The Home Office as to Great Britain, and the Lord-Lieutenant as to Ireland, may, upon application of the justices in quarter sessions assembled of any county, extend or vary the time during which the killing, wounding, and taking of wildfowl is prohibited by this Act; the extension or variation of such time by the Home Office shall be made by order under the hand of one of Her Majesty's Principal Secretaries of State, after the making of which order the penalties imposed by this Act shall in such county apply only to offences committed during the time specified in such order; and the extension of such time by the Lord-Lieutenant shall be made by order to be published in the *Dublin Gazette*, and a copy of the *London Gazette* or *Dublin Gazette* containing such order shall be evidence of the same having been made.

4. Where any person shall be found offending against this Act, it shall be lawful for any person to require the person so offending to give his Christian name, surname, and place of abode; and in case the person offending shall, after being so required, refuse to give his real name or place of abode, or give an untrue name or place of abode, he shall be liable, on being convicted of any such offence before a justice of the peace or the sheriff, to forfeit and pay, in addition to the penalties imposed by section two, such sum of money not exceeding two pounds as to the convicting justice or sheriff shall seem meet, together with the costs of the conviction.

5. One moiety of every penalty or forfeiture under this Act shall go and be paid to the person who shall inform and prosecute for the same, and the other moiety, shall, in England, be paid to some one of the overseers of the poor,

or to some other officer (as the convicting justice or justices may direct) of the parish, township, or place in which the offence shall have been committed, to be by such overseer or officer paid over to the use of the general rate of the county, riding, or division in which such parish, township, or place shall be situate, whether the same shall or shall not contribute to such general rate; and in Scotland, to the inspector of the poor of the parish in which the offence shall have been committed, to be by such inspector paid over to the use of such funds for the relief of the poor in such parish; and if recovered in Ireland, such penalty shall be applied according to the provisions of the Fines Act (Ireland), 1851, or any Act amending the same.

6. All offences mentioned in this Act, which shall be committed within the jurisdiction of the Admiralty, shall be deemed to be offences of the same nature and liable to the same punishments as if they had been committed upon any land in the United Kingdom, and may be dealt with, inquired of, tried, and determined in any county or place in the United Kingdom in which the offender shall be apprehended or be in custody, in the same manner in all respects as if they had been actually committed in that county or place; and in any information or conviction for any such offence the offence may be averred to have been committed on "the high seas;" and in Scotland any offence committed against this Act on the sea coast, or at sea beyond the ordinary jurisdiction of any sheriff or justice of the peace, shall be held to have been committed in any county abutting on such sea coast, or adjoining such sea, and may be tried and punished accordingly.

7. Where any offence under this Act is committed in or upon any waters forming the boundary between any two counties, district of quarter sessions or petty sessions, such offence may be prosecuted before any justice or justices of the peace or sheriff in either of such counties or district.



## CHAPTER XLIII.

### “WILDFOWLER’S” TABLE OF LOADS.

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FOR the convenience of shooters I now append my table of loads for cylinder and choke-bored shoulder guns of all sizes, and for punt guns, which table I have compiled at the request of many correspondents. Some guns, however, have idiosyncrasies of their own which must be studied. I do not, therefore, assert dogmatically that my loads will suit *every* gun, but I have a shrewd idea that they will be pretty near it, if the owners will try them carefully. :

**DOUBLE 20-BORE, 5LB. 10OZ. WEIGHT, AND 28IN. BARRELS, ORDINARY CHAMBERS.**

Gun and Requirements.	Powders.	Wads.	Shot and Wads.	Cases.
Cylinder, for ordinary shooting	2drs. C. & H. No. 2, or 28grs. Schultze	Card and thick felt .....	4oz., pink-faced .....	Fairly turned down.
" to throw close .....	2drs. or 28grs. ....	Full-sized waterproof pink- edged, thick felt, and card	4oz., card .....	Just turned down.
" to scatter .....	2½drs. or 31½grs. ....	Pink-faced .....	4oz., pink-faced .....	Fully turned down.
" to scatter much .....	1½drs. or 24½grs. ...	Pink-faced .....	4oz., card, 4oz., pink-faced or two.	Fully turned down.
Choke, for ordinary shooting ...	2drs. or 28grs. ....	Card and thick felt .....	4oz., pink-faced .....	Fairly turned down.
" to throw close .....	2drs. or 28grs. ....	Full-sized waterproof pink- edged, thick felt, and card	4oz., card .....	Just turned down.
" to scatter .....	1½drs. or 24½grs. ...	Pink-faced .....	4oz., pink-faced or two .....	Fully turned down.
" to scatter much .....	1½drs. or 24½grs. ...	Pink-faced .....	4oz., card, 4oz., pink-faced	Fully turned down.
" to scatter very much ...	2½drs. or 31½grs. ....	Pink-faced .....	4oz., card, 4oz., pink-faced or two.	Fully turned down.

**DOUBLE 20-BORE, 6LB. 2OZ. WEIGHT, AND 28IN. BARRELS, FULL CHAMBERED.**

Choke, for ordinary shooting ...	2½drs. C. & H. No. 2, or 35grs. Schultze	Card and thick felt .....	1oz., pink-faced .....	Fairly turned down.
" to throw close .....	2½drs. or 35grs. ....	Full-sized waterproof pink- edged, thick felt, and card	1oz., card .....	Just turned down.
" to scatter .....	2½drs. or 31grs. ....	Pink-faced .....	1oz., pink-faced or two .....	Fully turned down.
" to scatter much .....	2½drs. or 31grs. ....	Pink-faced .....	4oz., card, 4oz., pink-faced.	Fully turned down.
" to scatter very much ...	2½drs. or 38½grs. ...	Pink-faced .....	4oz., card, 4oz., pink-faced or two.	Fully turned down.

## DOUBLES 16-BORE, 6½LB. WEIGHT, AND 28IN. BARRELS, ORDINARY CHAMBERS.

Gun and Requirements.	Powders.	Wads.	Shot and wads.	Cases.
Cylinder, for ordinary shooting	2½dra. C. & H. No. 3, or 35grs. Schultze	Card and thick felt .....	1os., pink-faced .....	Fairly turned down.
" to throw close .....	2½dra. or 35grs. ....	Full-sized waterproof pink- edged, thick felt, and card	1os., card .....	Just turned down.
" to scatter .....	2½dra. or 38grs. ....	Pink-faced .....	1os., pink-faced .....	Fully turned down.
" to scatter much .....	2½dra. or 31grs. ....	Pink-faced .....	½os., card, ½os., pink-faced	Fully turned down.
Choke, for ordinary shooting ..	2½dra. or 35grs. ....	Card and thick felt .....	1os., pink-faced .....	Fairly turned down.
" to throw close .....	2½dra. or 35grs. ....	Full-sized waterproof pink- edged, thick felt, and card	1os., card .....	Just turned down.
" to scatter .....	2½dra. or 31grs. ....	Pink-faced .....	1os., pink-faced or two .....	Fully turned down.
" to scatter much .....	2½dra. or 31grs. ....	Pink-faced .....	½os., card, ½os., pink-faced	Fully turned down.
" to scatter very much ..	2½dra. or 38grs. ....	Pink-faced .....	½os., card, ½os., pink-faced or two.	Fully turned down.

## DOUBLES 16-BORE, 7½LB. WEIGHT, AND 28IN. BARRELS, OR SINGLE, 6LB. WEIGHT, FULL CHAMBERED.

Choke, for ordinary shooting ..	3dra. C. & H. No. 3, or 49grs. Schultze	Card and thick felt .. .....	1½os., pink-faced .....	Fairly turned down.
" to throw close .....	3dra. or 49grs. ....	Full-sized waterproof pink- edged, thick felt, and card	1½os., card .....	Just turned down.
" to scatter .....	2½dra. or 38½grs. ...	Pink-faced .....	1½os., pink-faced or two ..	Fully turned down.
" to scatter much .....	2½dra. or 38½grs. ...	Pink-faced .....	½os., card, ½os., pink-faced	Fully turned down.
" to scatter very much ..	2½dra. or 45½grs. ...	Pink-faced .....	½os., card, ½os., pink-faced or two.	Fully turned down.

**DOUBLES 14-BORE, 7LB. WEIGHT, 26IN. BARRELS, ORDINARY CHAMBERS.**

Cylinder, for ordinary shooting	2½dra. C. & H. No. 4, or 38½grs. Schultze	Card and thick felt .....	A little over 1oz., pink-faced	Fairly turned down.
" to throw close .....	2½dra. or 38½grs. ...	Full-sized waterproof pink- edged, thick felt, and card	A little over 1oz., card .....	Just turned down.
" to scatter .....	2½dra. or 35grs. ....	Pink-faced .....	A little over 1oz., pink-faced or two.	Fully turned down.
" to scatter much .....	2½dra. or 35grs. ....	Pink-faced .....	½oz., card, a little over ½oz., pink-faced.	Fully turned down.
Choke, for ordinary shooting ..	2½dra. or 38½grs. ...	Card and thick felt .....	A little over 1oz., pink-faced	Fairly turned down.
" to throw close .....	2½dra. or 38½grs. ...	Full-sized waterproof pink- edged, thick felt, and card	A little over 1oz., card .....	Just turned down.
" to scatter .....	2½dra. or 35grs. ....	Pink-faced .....	A little over 1oz., pink-faced or two.	Fully turned down.
" to scatter much .....	2½dra. or 35grs. ....	Pink-faced .....	½oz., card, a little over ½oz., pink-faced.	Fully turned down.
" to scatter very much ..	3dra. or 42grs. ....	Pink-faced .....	½oz., card, a little over ½oz., pink-faced or two.	Fully turned down.

**DOUBLES 12-BORE, 7LB. 4oz. WEIGHT, AND 26IN. BARRELS, ORDINARY CHAMBERS.**

Cylinder, for ordinary shooting	3dra. C. & H. No. 4, or 42grs. Schultze	Card and thick felt .....	1½oz., pink-faced .....	Fairly turned down.
" to throw close .....	3dra. or 42grs. ....	Full-sized waterproof pink- edged, thick felt, and card	1½oz., card .....	Just turned down.
" to scatter .....	3½dra. or 45½grs. ...	Pink-faced .....	1½oz., pink-faced .....	Fully turned down.
" to scatter much .....	2½dra. or 38½grs. ...	Pink-faced .....	½oz., card, ½oz., pink-faced.	Fully turned down.
Choke, for ordinary shooting ..	3dra. or 42grs. ....	Card and thick felt .....	1½oz., pink-faced .....	Fairly turned down.
" to throw close .....	3dra. or 42grs. ....	Full-sized waterproof pink- edged, thick felt, and card	1½oz., card .....	Just turned down.
" to scatter .....	2½dra. or 38½grs. ...	Pink-faced .....	1½oz., pink-faced or two ...	Fully turned down.
" to scatter much .....	2½dra. or 38½grs. ...	Pink-faced .....	½oz., card, ½oz., pink-faced	Fully turned down.
" to scatter very much ..	3½dra. or 45½grs. ...	Pink-faced .....	½oz., card, ½oz., pink-faced or two	Fully turned down.

## DOUBLE 12-BORE, 7LB. 13OZ. WEIGHT, AND 28IN. BARRELS, FULL CHAMBERED.

Gun and Requirements.	Powders.	Wads.	Shot and wads.	Cases.
Choke, for ordinary shooting...	3½drs. C. & H. No. 4, or 4½grs. Schultze	Card and thick felt .....	1½oz., pink-faced .....	Fairly turned down.
" to throw close .....	3½drs. or 4½grs. ...	Full-sized waterproof pink- edged, thick felt, and card	1½oz., card .....	Just turned down.
" to scatter .....	3drs. or 42grs. ....	Pink-faced .....	1½oz., pink-faced or two ...	Fully turned down.
" to scatter much .....	3drs. or 42grs. ....	Pink-faced .....	1½oz., card, ½oz., pink-faced	Fully turned down.
" to scatter very much ...	3½drs. or 49grs. ....	Pink-faced .....	1½oz., card, ½oz., pink-faced or two	Fully turned down.

## HEAVY WILDFOWL.—DOUBLE 12-BORE, 8½LB. WEIGHT, 28IN. BARRELS, OR SINGLE, 7LB. WEIGHT, FULL CHAMBERED.

Choke, for ordinary shooting...	3½drs. C. & H. No. 4, or 49grs. Schultze	Card and thick felt .....	1½oz. No. 2, pink-faced .....	Fairly turned down
" to throw close .....	3½drs. or 49grs. ....	Full-sized waterproof pink- edged, thick felt, and card	1½oz. B., card .....	Just turned down.

## DOUBLE 10-BORE, 9½LB. WEIGHT, OR SINGLE 10-BORE, 8½LB. WEIGHT, AND 30IN. BARRELS, ORDINARY CHAMBERS.

Cylinder, for ordinary shooting	4½drs. C. & H. No. 5, or 59grs. Schultze	Card and thick felt .....	1½oz., pink-faced .....	Fairly turned down.
" to throw close .....	4½drs. or 59grs. ...	Full-sized waterproof pink- edged, thick felt, and card	1½oz., card .....	Just turned down.
" to scatter .....	4½drs. or 63grs. ....	Pink-faced .....	1½oz., pink-faced .....	Fully turned down.
" to scatter much .....	4drs. or 59grs. ....	Pink-faced .....	1½oz., card, ½oz., pink-faced	Fully turned down.
Choke, for ordinary shooting...	4½drs. or 59grs. ...	Card and thick felt .....	1½oz., pink-faced .....	Fairly turned down.
" to throw close .....	4½drs. or 59grs. ....	Full-sized waterproof pink- edged, thick felt, and card	1½oz., card .....	Just turned down.

" to scatter .....	4drs. or 56grs. ....	Pink-faced.....	1½oz., pink-faced or two ...	Fully turned down.
" to scatter much .....	4drs. or 56grs. ....	Pink-faced.....	½oz., card, ½oz., pink-faced	Fully turned down.
" to scatter very much ...	4½drs. or 63grs.....	Pink-faced.....	½oz., card, ½oz., pink-faced or two.	Fully turned down.

DOUBLE 10-BORE, 9½LB. WEIGHT, OR SINGLE 10-BORE, 9LB. WEIGHT, AND 30IN. BARRELS, FULL CHAMBERED.

Choke, for ordinary shooting ...	4½drs. C. & H. No. 5, or 63grs. Schultze	Card and thick felt .....	1½oz., pink-faced .....	Fairly turned down.
" to throw close .....	4½drs. or 63grs.....	Full-sized waterproof pink- edged, thick felt, and card	1½oz., card .....	Just turned down.
" to scatter .....	4½drs. or 59½grs. ...	Pink-faced .....	1 oz., pink-faced or two ...	Fully turned down.
" to scatter much .....	4½drs. or 59½grs. ...	Pink-faced .....	½oz., card, ½oz., pink-faced	Fully turned down.
" to scatter very much ...	4½drs. or 66 grs. ...	Pink-faced.....	½oz., card, ½oz., pink-faced or two.	Fully turned down.

DOUBLE 8-BORE, 12LB. WEIGHT, AND 32IN. BARREL OR SINGLE 8-BORE, 10LB. WEIGHT, AND 32IN. BARREL, ORDINARY CHAMBERS.

Cylinder, for ordinary shooting	6½drs. C. & H. No. 6, or 91½grs. Schultze	Card and thick felt .....	2oz., pink-faced .....	Fairly turned down.
" to throw close .....	6½drs. or 91½grs. ...	Full-sized waterproof pink- edged, thick felt, and card	2oz., card .....	Just turned down.
Choke, for ordinary shooting...	6½drs. or 91½grs. ...	Card and thick felt .....	2oz., pink-faced .....	Fairly turned down.
" for long range.....	7drs. or 98grs. ....	Full-sized waterproof pink- edged, thick felt, and card	1½oz. BB., card .....	Just turned down.

DOUBLE 8-BORE, 18LB. WEIGHT, 34IN. BARRELS, OR SINGLE, 11LB. WEIGHT, FULL CHAMBERED.

Choke, for ordinary shooting...	8drs. C. & H. No. 7, or 112grs. Schultze	Card and thick felt .....	2½oz. No. 2, pink-faced.....	Fairly turned down.
" for long range .....	8½drs. or 119grs. ...	Full-sized waterproof pink- edged, thick felt, and card	2½oz. BB., card .....	Just turned down.



**PUNT GUNS.—LONG RANGE SHOOTING.**

Same loads, but very large shot being used, and in Musalloaders, Eley's  $\frac{1}{2}$ lb.,  $\frac{3}{4}$ lb., 1lb. (and so on), wire cartridges should be resorted to.

**PUNT GUNS.—SHORT RANGE.—NIGHT SHOOTING.**

Increase the powder by one-eighth of the usual load; use the same load of shot, reduce the thickness of powder wad by one-half, and increase that over the shot in the same ratio. The thicker the shot wad, the more scatter will be produced.

N.B.—In small punt guns I have fired a mixture of Lafour's and Schultze in the proportion of 2 to 1, as named, but cannot speak decisively as to the merits of the mixture, although I liked it, because I have not tried it at targets. On fowl it was very effective indeed. What it would do in large punt guns I know not, but fear that it would be rather too quick.

With regard to punt-gun powders, I may say that I have tried during my last trips four samples of Messrs Pigeon, Wilks, and Laurence's powders, and have been very pleased with them, particularly No. 3, which is a clean and most powerful powder.



## CHAPTER XLIV.

### NETTING PLOVERS AND SNIPE SNARING.

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ONE of the greatest mistakes in our game legislation is that of allowing the netting and snaring of certain species of birds.

In the recent Licence Act, occurs, in Sect. 5, the following: "Excepts from the provisions of the Act: 1. The taking of woodcocks and snipes with nets and springes in Great Britain."

Now, I think it is uncommonly hard on the large body of sportsmen that, in this epoch of high rentals for shootings, anyone may destroy on his ground with nets and snares as many snipe and woodcock (or anything else which will run its head into a net or snare), without so much as paying a 10s. duty for the privilege, let alone taking a game certificate.

This is quite inexplicable and most unfair to shooters. The latter have to employ explosives, which drive away a good many of the birds from them, so that if they do kill a few, many more may escape. Not so with the netter or snarer. He does his work silently, and very clever are the birds which can escape his cunning. Therefore, he makes a heavy score, and pays nothing for it, whereas the shooter, handicapped with his noisy weapon, pays, and has to be content with what he can surprise, despite the explosion from his weapon.

Moreover, setting snares for a particular kind of bird is apt to induce the snarer to set many more for other species, and, in districts where snaring is extensively carried on, game birds of any sort are wonderfully scarce, and no one should be surprised at their scarcity.

But, even admitting, for the sake of argument, that the snarer confines his tricks to snipe and woodcock, as he is by law entitled to do, is it fair to sportsmen that such a law should stand? Take, for instance, two marshes adjoining each other, one, say, is shot over by a sportsman; the next is severely snared. In the first our shooter stalks forth, Tchick! goes a snipe, Bang! says his gun. Whether he kills the bird or not does not much signify; he, anyhow, unsettles many more birds, which, if a bit lively, forthwith get up on all sides and make tracks for the other marsh, where everything appears quite peaceable. Meanwhile the shooter goes on about his sport, and for, say, ten snipe that he kills, he may send hundreds over to his neighbour's land. Now, this land is before dusk thickly covered with nooses. Every likely little bit of soft has a line or a springe, and when all is satisfactorily set the snarer goes home. The next morning he comes at about ten o'clock, so as to give time to early feeders to get caught, and he will find perhaps twenty couple or more of birds secured—dead or dying. And his silent system insures the attraction of the birds, who will flock to a place where they are never startled by gun shots. Now, all this is legal; nothing, therefore, can be said against the snarer; but is it satisfactory to the neighbouring sportsman, or, for the matter of that, to every other sportsman who handles the gun? Certainly not. The snarer reaps an undue proportion of birds. If he took only as many as he could kill with a gun it would not be so bad, but he makes a clean sweep of all, and that is not satisfactory. Some of the birds might have gone to other men's lands and shown them sport, whereas by this miserable plan they die a wretched death, and no one is the better for their presence in the place except the snarer, who, by the sale of their carcases, puts a few pounds into his pocket.

Now, game and all species of birds have much risen in value of late, so that snaring, wherever practicable, is carried on most systematically and most unsparingly. Of course, that sort of thing greatly diminishes the general stock of birds, and then those sportsmen who take the field in their pursuit complain of their scarcity. No wonder, I think, that there are

such few woodcocks coming to our woods when they are netted extensively in the next. No wonder that snipe are scarce in our marshes when the next marshes are literally covered over with nooses.

But is this right and equitably allowable? I say most decidedly, no! and the sooner such an exception in favour of snaring is made away with the better.

"A man may do what he likes with his own," someone may argue; but I beg to demur to this—no man can do what he likes with his own, if, by so doing, he injures the community. Suppose a man living in a thickly-populated district had a barrel of gunpowder, and chose to set fire to it *because it was his own*; would he not have to answer for it, supposing he escaped destruction himself? Such arguments are untenable, and I repeat that snaring, affecting severely, as it does, the general sport of the community, should no longer be allowed, or, if allowed, the premium given to it by the law exempting it from any tax or imposition should be forthwith repealed and a heavy tax imposed.

Of what good is a snarer to the nation? He procures birds which shooters would kill if he did not interfere, therefore, from a market point of view, he is not needed. Then, he buys neither guns nor ammunition, nor dogs; he pays no game tax, and yet he reaps far more profit than those who do all that! Is this fair? Is this just? Now, the vast majority of shooters are pretty well aware of this state of things, but they rarely like to bestir themselves. The *laissez faire* policy is their motto, but they are quite wrong. It is, in this case, a suicidal motto, and every day proves it more and more forcibly. You will hear, repeatedly, men complaining of having spent days in a marsh, or in a covert, where they used to find, respectively, many snipe or woodcocks in years gone by, and now hardly a shot do they fire. This scarcity of the birds is attributed to a bad breeding season; the weather was too wet or too dry, or something else—everything, in fact, but the right nail is hit on the head. But I say that if egg gathering and bird snaring were severely forbidden, that our stock of long-bills would very soon reach its old figure. But how, now,

can we have birds? In the spring all likely places are carefully searched, and all the eggs that can be found are picked up and sold. Then the few eggs that escape such premature destruction and are hatched do little good towards restocking, as the birds are netted or snared the moment they want to feed. And yet some people wonder that these birds are scarce! I don't. I only wonder that we have any left at all!

Netting for plovers is allowed and practised a good deal abroad, and various plans are resorted to. The simplest of all consists in setting up a net near a spot where the birds have been noticed roosting the previous night; and before daybreak the netters make their appearance and stand still in a semi-circle at a distance from the net. At dawn the sentry bird calls out, and at once all the other birds wake up, reply to its call, and make ready for the new day's foraging. The men then gently and slowly drive the birds towards the net, and when they are just facing it they are startled into it; it falls down, and secures many if the men have done the trick well and the birds have stood it satisfactorily. Sometimes the whole flock may thus be taken.

Another plan consists in rigging out a bascule net near the birds' haunts, and tying several tame call-birds or stales on a line in front of the net. If no live birds are available, some stuffed ones should be pegged about the net, and there should be a low hut in which the netter hides himself, and from whence he calls the birds with artificial calls and works the net.

It takes a good deal of practice to call well, but the calls imitate the birds true to nature when the man is an expert, and he actually brings them into his net with almost absolute precision, if no one or nothing disturbs them whilst he is working them. The call is made with a piece of the leg-bone of a goat, sawn whistle shape at both ends and pierced with sundry holes.

The netter, with a bascule net, from his hut, notes how the flocks behave to his call birds or to his own calling. If they appear wild he must humour them a good deal, and bide his

time; but very early in the morning he is almost sure of a good catch, because, when the wild birds hear the first calls, they at once jump to the conclusion that some of their *confrères* have already found a nice feeding ground, and they at once sweep towards them for a feed, when the fatal net secures them.

It is astonishing to note how readily some birds, but especially plovers, are decoyed by live birds or dummies of their own species. And if the netter, by lifting his line, makes the call birds open their wings, it renders the whole affair so natural that the wild ones are sure to be taken in. The line is tied at one end to the top of a stake, some two feet above the ground, and the birds are tied to it at sundry intervals. The other end of the line, of course, comes into the hut. Now, when the netter tightens this line, the whole of the live birds are lifted off their legs a foot or so. Of course they spread their wings to preserve their equilibrium, and, being at once dropped again, they fold their wings back again, and resume their picking up of worms, if there are any about. The whole scene, therefore, appears just as if the birds were free, and now and then getting up restlessly, as they will do when wild, at feeding times. Naturally, dummies do not answer so well as live birds, since they lack motion; but the artificial calling by the netter, if he is clever, makes up for that to some extent.

Lapwings, who, in their wild state, mix readily with plovers, make the best of decoy birds, both for their own kind and for plovers; and when live lapwings are tethered to the line and lifted up, their dark bodies, and now and then the white underneath their wings, render them quite conspicuous. This, joined to their calls, is simply irresistible to their congeners.

Spring and autumn are the times at which this plover-netting business is carried on, but I think that if this netting *must* be carried on, it should be allowed only in autumn, since, by resorting to it during the spring, the netters are simply killing the "goose with the golden eggs." The staple argument in favour of netting on the Continent is a most selfish one. "The birds are migratory," say the French; "therefore, when we do find them in our country, let us net and kill, anyhow, as many

as we can at all times, since, if we allow them to go, we may never see them again."

Well, if every nation were to reason in the same manner, the species would very soon be exterminated. Why should any people be so selfish? Are we not all members of mankind, whatever our respective nationalities may be? If one nation destroys wantonly the food of *man*, that nation does no good to itself, since it consists of *men*, who must also eventually suffer from the dearth of good things.

There should be *international laws* forbidding in every country anything which may prove unprofitable to mankind in general. But will this ever be? That is the question. Meanwhile we on this side of the Channel pick up plovers' eggs, and the French on the other side kill the birds at their breeding season by thousands. This being so, if we only wait patiently enough, and things go on at the same rate, by and by plovers and lapwings will be as extinct as the dodo. When this takes place, probably, people will wonder how it could possibly have occurred, and laws will be passed *then* for the protection of birds which will no longer exist. Legislators are very sensible—very. They shut the stable door when the steed is stolen, and congratulate themselves then on their wisdom. The snaring of plovers is not of quite so exterminating a character as netting; but it, nevertheless, does a good deal of damage, and I would also have it abolished. When guns come into play birds have a chance of escape, which chance is not given them in either snaring or netting.

The actual snaring of plovers and lapwings is managed in the following manner: The wild birds, after having been tramping about in the grass for worms, find their feet dirty, and they accordingly repair to the nearest streams or ponds or pools, in order to wash their feet and clean their bills. The snarers take advantage of this habit, and by surrounding every available bit of water with nooses they often secure a pretty large percentage of the birds.

For snipe there are four or five different ways of setting snares; the two most commonly put in practice, however, are the springe and the line noose.

The spring consists of a noose tied at the end of a bent twig, one end of which is firmly thrust in the ground, and the other end (where the noose is) is caught by a forked peg in such a way that the noose is held in position for the bird to step in or run his neck through, &c., when, as soon as caught, in his struggles to escape the bird liberates the confined end of the twig, which, rising suddenly, lifts him up off the ground, thus insuring his speedy death by strangulation.

The other plan consists simply in tying a lot of horsehair nooses on a long line, which is stretched ziz-zag fashion by means of small forked sticks thrust into the ground at all likely places for snipe feeding.

This plan is the most certain of execution, and most destructive withal, if the line is well set, because, if the snipe misses four or five nooses, it is sure at last to run its neck or legs into another, and thus be caught. I have often seen scores of snipe thus taken in one single morning, and the affair was anything but entertaining to me. Anything more riling to a sportsman can hardly be conceived than the sight of many of what he considers his legitimate prey, and his only, being thus disposed of for the market, without any sport of any sort being derived from them. It is abominable in my eyes.

On some parts of the Lincolnshire coast nets are set over the saltings to this very day, for catching sea birds; but I have never elsewhere in England seen nets being resorted to on the sea shore. In short, the gun is mostly relied upon here for sea birds; but for snipe and woodcock there are many districts where snaring and netting are extensively resorted to. I have described how the nooses are set for snipe and plovers, and how the nets are worked for plovers and lapwings, because these methods of securing them supply very many thousands of these birds to our markets, and it is interesting to know how they are caught, but I should very much like to see legislation step in and all such tricks being totally abolished. When this does take place, quite a new and most welcome era will begin for sportsmen.

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## CHAPTER XLV.

### SNARING AND HOOKING SEA-FOWL ON THE CONTINENT.

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It is somewhat puzzling at first for a stranger to make out how the poorer villagers who live on the coasts of France and Belgium manage to live at all.

True, they all have, somehow, a house of their own, and however low may be the standard of its comforts, it is a house after all, and, no doubt, to a poor man, a pleasant house withal. Moreover, with the cottages, generally (I might say almost invariably, without fear of contradiction), there is a little bit of garden, where the coastmen grow such vegetables as the pooriness of the land will permit to reach maturity; but they have no trade, and no visible means of subsistence, so that, as I said when beginning this paper, really one may be excused for being astonished at finding them eking out their existence, year after year, with seemingly pretty fair contentment.

How do they manage to do this?

Such was the problem I set to myself when I first began my rambles on the Continent, and a very few weeks sufficed to show me that, to these sharp and clever (in their way) men, the sea and its *jetsam* and *flotsam*, together with its fishes and its birds, is the mainstay of existence. To them it offers a living, such as it is, precarious, and hard to get, but perhaps all the sweeter maybe for its inherent uncertainty, its difficulties, and its hardships.



As regards the *flotsam* and *jetsam*, the Crown claims, everywhere, with extreme punctiliousness, the right to everything that comes ashore of its own accord; but the Continental peasants elude this by wading to the pieces of wreckage, &c., and bringing them ashore in the dead of the night, as soon as the coastguards have turned their backs. And even when a wreck has actually come ashore, and the coastguards have set their hands on it, the peasants manage somehow to get a share thereof, and it takes a very honest, clever, and wideawake set of officers to prevent them from doing so.

But where these peasants excel above all things is in their extraordinary devices for securing sea-fish, and especially sea-fowl.

Now, when a British shoreman does turn his attention to fishing he does it wholesale, and must make a not inconsiderable outlay. He must have a boat, he must have a net. The Continental shoreman, being unable to afford such an expense, is content with his bits of string and a few pennyworth of hooks; and he so manages his lines and his baits, in accordance with the tides, the wind, and the fish in season, and he has such a knack of setting his hooks, that he is tolerably sure of a good haul at the next ebb-tide. Similarly, when the British coast-man turns wild-fowl shooter, he goes into it on a large scale—he rigs out a punt, or starts a shooting-smack with some friends. Failing these, he buys a large bore muzzle-loading gun, and stalks the fowl, or goes “fighting.” It is only in select spots, where old fenmen have preserved their traditions, that a few nets are still being set up for wildfowl or sea-fowl. All that is done now, as a general rule, by the average English professional wild-fowler is done with the gun. He has not the patience to set snares, even if he knew how to set them; but the knowledge and practice thereof has pretty nearly died out here. Hence, he can do nothing, either in the fishing or the shooting line, without a pretty large investment in either nets, guns, or boats and ammunition.

Now this is all very well for those who can afford it, but there is no doubt that the investment of a comparatively good round sum in such implements would break the foreign coast

men's purses and hearts. If they had the money they would not part with it. Some of them have guns, but these are either army muskets, to be had for the picking up in war-time, or when there is a "row" between the Governments and their undutiful subjects; or else small-bore fowling-pieces without range and without strength. None of these instruments can "tell" much on the tough fowl of the sea (although the old army muskets, when used, are hopefully loaded with a handful of small bullets), and the consequence thereof is that when the men wish to secure sea-fowl they must needs resort to some other means, and that is precisely where they do show their marvellous patience and cunning ingenuity. Nothing escapes the Continental snarer. Hidden, at daybreak, in the downs or among the cliffs, for days and weeks if necessary, he watches the shore, and when the birds begin to appear he knows that the "passage" is near at hand, and he forthwith prepares his nooses and his hooks, according to the season.

"What!" some reader will exclaim, "hooks!—hooks for birds? Impossible."

But no, kind reader, it is not impossible. I have seen it done, and these hooks, well prepared, are most certain of action, and consequently very destructive.

But first let me treat of the nooses. The first time that I saw nooses set for sea-birds I was on the sands of the Belgian coast. I was shooting along the shore at the time, and when I reached the breaksand at a certain village, a middle-aged peasant came down to me in hot haste from the downs, and besought me not to fire for a while.

"Why not?" I asked rather curtly (no sportsman likes to have his sport curtailed in any way).

"Well," he said, "of course I cannot prevent you from doing so if you choose to, but the fact is, I have some snares set up yonder, and a lot of birds are, I believe, likely to be caught."

"Oh! snares, eh?" queried I, musingly; "snares for sea-birds. I am curious to see them, and if you will promise to show them to me, I certainly shall not fire or interfere with their working."

"*Très bien,*" said he, highly pleased. "Come along with me, then."

And, saying these words, he led the way into the downs, where, being out of the sight of any birds on the shore, we walked on at a good pace for about half a mile, when my man placed his finger on his lips to inform me that silence was to be observed, and he then crept forward across the sand hills toward the sea. When he reached the last hill he went up about half way, then chose a clump of coarse grass which was growing on the top, and, hiding his face behind it, he looked through it in silence for a second or two. Then, beckoning me to come forward, I went up, and, lying down by his side, I also scanned the shore, and a strange sight met my gaze. The tide, I should premise, was rising fast, and had about an hour more to rise in order to reach high-water mark, so that whatever birds were at the time on the shore feeding were slowly, but surely, driven by the flood tide towards the downs. Now there were about two hundred birds of various kinds about, within two hundred yards or so from our place of concealment — curlews, oyster catchers, ring dotterels, oxbirds, sandpipers, and a few shanks. These birds were all strutting about, feeding, running hither and thither, in and out of the shallow water, over the sands, spreading their wings, and "calling" occasionally; altogether they formed as pretty a picture as any man could wish to see.

"Well," I whispered into the man's ear, "but where are your nooses?"

"Oh," he said, "*you* cannot see them from here, but *I* can, because I know where I have placed them. However, you see those dry tongues of sand yonder, against the downs, almost now surrounded by the brine?"

"I do."

"Well, in a moment more, the birds will all be driven there, and that is where my nooses are set. Now, you look," he added, with eagerness; "look, they are getting near them!"

And as he spoke, lying there at full length in the grass, he literally devoured the scene before him. As for me, I looked on with *all* my eyes. There were, on the outskirts of the

little flock, three curlews, feeding higher up than the rest, and presently I saw one of these suddenly throw up his head and open his beak; and, simultaneously, I heard him crying out most lustily. At the same time he backed with a jerk, spreading his wings violently; but he was irresistibly held somehow, for he fell on his breast, got up again in a twinkling, and wriggled his body with extraordinary vigour, all the time shouting "Millions of murders" as loud as he could shout. Now, at his first cry of distress, the whole, till then, unsuspecting flock had been so startled that they had jumped on their wings, and they all seemed inclined to go; but, whether for sympathy or whether through anger against whatever was hurting their comrade, I am unable to say. Anyhow, certain it is, that instead of going their way, all the curlews, at any rate, and some of the smaller waders, came back half flying, half running, and crowded round their yelling companion, who was all the time struggling most desperately, flooring himself on his back, on his sides, and on his breast twenty times in a second almost, in his frantic efforts to get loose. In a moment four more birds joined his outcry—for they, too, were caught; and I have never heard such a "squalling," either before or since, as I heard then.

"Some of them will get loose by breaking the nooses if I don't release them," quoth the man; "for they are all on the same string, I can see, and it will certainly give way under their united efforts, so I had better run and secure those that are caught, or I may lose all."

So saying, he tumbled down the sand hills, and I followed suit, but he was tearing along like a madman, and it was quite funny to see him kick away his wooden shoes, which impeded his speedy progress. Of course, as soon as he appeared on the bare sands those of the birds that were still free bolted instanter; but as I knew that when the snarer would handle the caught birds the free ones might come back, I cocked both hammers of my double Tolley 10-bore, and it was fortunate I had thought of that, for no sooner did the man appear near the line than the five noosed curlews jumped up with a will, screaming "currr-lew! currr-lew!" in such a

terrified and lamentable tone, that their comrades forthwith turned back again, wheeled our way, and when they passed overhead, I gave them the benefit of both barrels, and killed two. After that the rest made themselves "scarce."

Meanwhile, the peasant was busy picking up his catch, and I watched him curiously. The birds struck at him furiously on being seized, but their bills are too soft to hurt anyone. Still, they tried their best to pinch him, I daresay, but he paid but little heed to their attacks, and, removing them one by one, he twisted their necks expeditiously, and threw them on the sands, dead or dying. However, when he had settled three in that style, and whilst he was freeing the fourth, previous to giving him the *coup de grâce*, the fifth somehow got free, and it was lucky I had reloaded and was ready, for had it been otherwise we should certainly have lost him, as he opened his powerful pinions without loss of time, said "currr-lew!" with a thankful intonation, and was going with a noose hanging from one of his legs; but I was on him in a moment, and in the very midst of "curr" (the "lew" never came) the cartridge cut him down handsomely at a range of some fifty yards or so. I had then time to look at the nooses. Imagine several very long lines, pretty tightly stretched in sundry directions by being run from a series of small stakes thrust in the sands zig-zag fashion. From the lines hung the nooses, made merely of string and horsehair. It must have been pretty hard work to prepare and set the whole lot. Of course the whole family—man, wife, and three or four children—had had to work at it, and truly this was a game of chance and patience with a vengeance, especially when one takes into consideration that the settling of the birds at all in the direct neighbourhood of the snares was almost a speculation. Of course the man, who lives close by, watches for the most suitable spots, and he chooses those where he notices that the companies love most to settle for feeding. But even with that knowledge, and even with ten lines spread, end on to each other, and covering perhaps a hundred yards of the shore, it must be always doubtful whether or not they will meet with success. He takes his chance of that, of course;

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but I strongly suspected at the time that some bait of some sort (such as sea lugs, &c.), had been used in conjunction with the lines, but the man said no ; perhaps he did not care about telling me. One can rarely get at the bottom of such things with these men.

However, from what I had just seen, I concluded then and there that the snaring of sea-fowl must have been a paying concern during the time of passage, at any rate ; but the man soon convinced me that my surmises were not correct. First of all, the plan can only be carried out at high tide ; secondly, the " passage " must be abundant ; thirdly, the wind must be dead on shore, or nearly so, otherwise the birds would detect the snarer's presence ; fourthly, the high tide must take place not sooner than mid day, or thereabouts, so as to give the man time to place his lines and stretch the nooses ; and then the birds do not always choose the same part of the shore, although they have, undoubtedly, favourite spots, probably on account of some peculiarly attractive morsels being found there naturally, if not artificially, by them. However, from all this it will be seen that there is a good deal of trouble, uncertainty, and speculation about the affair, and it would certainly pay none but men to whom a few shillings are very welcome, and who have nothing better and more profitable to attend to. It is, however, a trick worth knowing, as it undoubtedly must bring a good many sea birds to market one season or another.

Strange to say, no decoys are used ; the decoy birds would give too much trouble to keep, the man averred. This is probably right, but no doubt a few " dummies " would answer. I think so, at any rate ; and, as dummies cost nothing to keep, I wonder the plan is not resorted to.

Now I come to the hooking process. In winter time, be it known, the coasts of Belgium and Holland are lined with black ducks, widgeon, teal, ducks, geese, and swans in hard times, besides which myriads of seagulls turn up in quest of food.

Now for black ducks, which are especially caught near the breaksands, where they come to feed on the mussels, the

hooks are attached to very long lines baited with mussel or lugs, and the baited hooks are slightly buried in the sand at low tide, near the water's edge. When the tide advances the ducks come along with it in search of food. The black customers dive, find the tempting bait, swallow it, and are then pulled ashore.

I have had scores of birds thus caught offered me even as near Ostend as Mariakerque (only a mile or so from the town); and the process, to this very day, is being carried out in winter time. Of course it will sometimes occur that other birds besides black ducks are thus caught; but generally the latter are the staple game thus secured, simply because they are very forward, and come up speedily towards shore with the tide, so as to seek for food, although, be it borne in mind, they never come nearer than two hundred yards from *terra firma*, being firmly impressed, no doubt, with the absolute desirability of keeping their precious little selves out of harm's way. Of course, in this, they only fear sportsmen with duck guns, and they reckon without the baited hooks, which secure them, however, far more effectively than a dose of shot, for they are remarkably tough customers—(this by the way).

Now, sinking baited hooks answers two ends—it may either catch a flounder or other fish, or a *macreuse*, if crabs don't eat the bait. For sea-gulls, however, and those other birds which fly over the sea but do not make a practice of diving for their food, another dodge is resorted to. Three hooks are tied together so as to form something uncommonly like a triangle snap hook. These are baited with a large dead fish, and left promiscuously on a shore near the brine, but tied to a long line. The gulls soon pounce upon it, fight as to who shall get it, and one of them is almost sure to be secured, if the hooker allows him time to gorge well his bait.

That is one plan, but it can only be done in out-of-the-way places, where no one is likely to be about and disturb the spot. The next plan, however, can be carried out anywhere whenever sea gulls are about; but the wind must be off shore, and pretty strong, so as to blow the bait out to sea.

The bait is artificial, and is made of a piece of cork out

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coffin-shape, and covered over with a piece of parchment (the latter as white as possible), and the end opposite to the one where the line is tied is supplied with two square-bodied hooks, whose points are turned downwards.

Now, supposing the wind is all right, and several gulls are about, the hooker comes to the brink of the sea, throws the bait away as far as possible, and allows it to drift as far as the line will go; or, better still, he lets it lie at low tide, and waits for high tide for success. Whichever way it is done, as soon as the birds will spy the bait on the sea, they will take it to be a dead fish, and forthwith will pounce upon it. If one does not manage to swallow it another one will, thinking that by accident his *confrère* has dropped the choice morsel. No sooner has he gobbled it up, than the string is jerked sharply by the hidden hooker, and the bird is brought, though flying strenuously the other way, to the shore, in spite of all his efforts to the contrary. Once there, of course, his fate is sealed.

The birds are eaten by the natives, and their down and feathers are profitably disposed of.

Now, if the hookers were always careful to see that their lines and hooks were secure, it would only be half bad to see birds caught in that way, but they don't. I, when shooting along the Belgian coast, have repeatedly found half-dead birds on the sands with the fatal hooks stuck in their mandibles, and a more or less lengthy and rotten piece of string dragging about. Now, this is "cruelty to animals" with a vengeance.

I have in my possession now two specimens of these different hooking affairs *taken by myself from live birds*. One of the birds I found dying on the sands, with the hook in his beak, and the string caught around one of his wings. The other hook affair I took out of the beak of a large black-backed gull I shot near Ostend. I saw the bird coming along with something sticking out of his bill, and out of curiosity, I shot it to see what it was, with the result that I found the hook firmly fixed in his beak. I shot afterwards several more birds in similar circumstances, from



whence I conclude that hooking must be pretty extensively carried on along the coast. Certainly many of the birds which are sent to the market are thus caught, and I think it interesting to narrate how the affair is conducted, as it is one of the most successful dodges to which the capture of sea fowl has given rise. As a trick, the thing is worth knowing; but as a sportsman I need not say that I do not look upon it with any favour; very far from it.

We must, however, take facts as they stand, and I have chronicled the deeds as being of some interest to those to whom the various modes adopted for the capture of birds is welcome information.

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## CHAPTER XLVI.

### DECOYING INTO THE "PIPES."

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THE man who invented decoying into "pipes" was certainly no fool.

This is an axiom, the truth of which I will try to render apparent by my description of the "dodge."

Three weaknesses of the ducks, teal, and widgeon in this affair are played upon by the decoymen. Firstly, the unconquerable curiosity of the fowl, and their hatred of foxes (or anything resembling foxes); secondly, their love of, and (misplaced) confidence in, their own species; thirdly, their greediness for food. Now, some men can always, and at all times, "liquor up." Ducks do not make such a practice of drinking—probably because there are no bars where duck drinks are manufactured by cunning barmaids—but they make up for it by their immoderate love of eating. Ducks can always eat. Where they stow it all away is a matter of much doubtful speculation, but that they do swallow an absolutely extravagant lot of food is a fact. Give a sackful of oats to a duck and he will eat the lot, and look for more. This is well known, and hence the decoyer acts partly upon his stomach to allure him. Then, just as in a gambling "hell," there are well-dressed male and female confederates acting the part of decoys to the unwary, well-to-do men about town, so, in a decoy, well-trained tame fowl, by their trustful appearance and confiding actions, inspire confidence to the wild birds, who forthwith join them. As regards the fowls' curiosity, like mother Eve's, they are

induced to exercise it very injudiciously, as my narrative will show.

But let me describe succinctly the setting and working of a decoy. The first thing to be done is to choose a likely spot, in a retired and lonely district, where fowl will love to congregate. The pond being found, four, five, six, or more curved "pipes" (to suit all winds), are forthwith prepared. These are simply ditches, branching off in various directions, and covered over with netting. These ditches technically are called working pipes. They end in a tapering *coul-de-sac* netting, which can be bodily removed from the pipe when a catch has been secured, and the fowls' necks are to be twisted.

Now the question is, how to induce the fowl which may be on the open to enter these pipes. This is done by the aid of the "piper," some grain strewn on the water, and the decoy-birds. The latter, by their presence about the pond, attract the fowl and inspire them with a confidence in the place which they otherwise might not feel inclined to entertain. The grain, of course, appeals to the wild birds' stomachs; and, like upon all hungry stomachs, food does tell. The next attraction is "the piper." The piper is a small dog, yellowish in coat, and chosen as much as possible to resemble a fox. Now, in nature, whenever wildfowl when basking, for instance, on a pond, perceive a fox prowling about on the banks they invariably make towards it, whether through curiosity, love, or hatred, or all combined, is a question which will probably for ever remain a disputed point; but I opine for the latter. The birds recognise their natural enemy, and with a strange and unconquerable fatuity they follow his movements. They do not go near enough to fall a prey to him, but they follow him about at a distance, as though keeping watch on his movements, so as to make sure that he will not get in hiding and make an onslaught upon them when they are "banked," i.e., when basking on the banks of the pond, at which times they would fall an easy prey to his cunning.

Well, then, this propensity of the fowl to follow the fox's evolutions are taken advantage of by man, who, choosing a dog resembling a fox, and teaching him to perform sundry

evolutions at the mouth of, and along the pipe, entices the fowl to follow him there, and when they are far enough up the pipe, the fowler shows himself at the mouth of the tunnel, the fowl, in affright, rush up into the *cul-de-sac*, and there they are taken in hand one by one and killed.

This will explain roughly the *modus operandi*, but a description of an actual "take" in a decoy will, perhaps, prove more interesting.

It is now nearly twenty years ago since I went for the first time on such an expedition. As it was my first introduction into a decoy at all, the whole of the affair appeared then to me but very little short of miraculous in its extraordinary working.

It was on a very cold December afternoon. I had come by appointment, to meet the decoyman at his cottage, and when I had reached his house the good wife told me that he was at the decoy, but would be back in a few minutes, and would I be pleased to take a seat, &c. A quarter of an hour later, the fowler and his son, a lad of some fifteen summers; appeared, and a little dog frisking about them was introduced to me. This dog was the "piper," and his name was "Piper." Of course, the man greatly praised his pet, and the tales I heard there and then of his cleverness set my mouth watering, so much did I long to see him at work.

"I need not impress upon you, sir, that you will have to be perfectly silent," said the fowler, as we prepared for a start.

"Oh, you may depend upon me," said I.

"Mind, no coughing, no sneezing, no talking, not even a whisper."

"All right, I shall be as dumb as a fish."

"For you see, sir, the slightest noise would drive all the birds away, and I would lose my catch, and perhaps it would be days before the fowl would come again to the pond. When once they are frightened away, it takes a good deal to attract them again."

"I will take care not to disturb you or the fowl in any way. In fact, I shall remain perfectly passive, like a log of wood."

"Right you are, sir. Well now, John" (to his son), "bring up the peat brand for this gentleman, and we will go at once. There is a rare lot of birds in the decoy, now. But, perhaps, you would not mind putting on some clothes of mine?" added the old man, "it would be safer."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because the birds do scent strangers so," replied he. "Yes, it would be safer."

Well, of course, I did not mind, and behold me, then, two or three minutes later, with a suit a great deal too large for me, walking down a grassy lane, along, and under the low covert. Presently, I hear the quack! quack! of the fowl, and a five minutes' walk brings us to the top of the pipe, along which stand the two sets of screens. We get behind the outer screen, and treading gently, and with the utmost caution, we finally reach the last mouth screen, behind which the boy squats himself. The decoymen then takes me to the bottom screen, shows me a peg stuck therein, and in impressive pantomime, bids me to pull it out, and to look through. I do so, glueing my eye to the hole, and oh! Moses! what a sight!!! I was so taken aback that for two pins I would have jumped up and shouted for joy. About two hundred fowl were on the pond, and a couple of score were basking on the bank, some of the latter actually fast asleep with their heads under their wings! How peaceful they all looked!

The decoyman hardly smiled. He was evidently in dread lest he should miss his operations, so he signed to me to be still and to remain where I was.

He then went to the first fore screen and pitched on the water about half a hatful of tail-corn, whistling softly all the while in a peculiar fashion.

Instantly I observed that some score of ducks, the decoys evidently, tumbled from the bank into the water, and with others who were already afloat they swam somewhat quickly towards the call and the grain. On the latter they began to feed greedily as it drifted down the pipe towards the pond, and as they swam up the pipe many of the wild birds, attracted by their movements, and no doubt observing their feeding, swam

up too, but rather slowly, and also fed on the corn. All the others then joined in, and soon the whole pond was alive with the snapping of bills.

Meanwhile the decoys had gone some five or six yards up the pipe, and the decoyman, with an anxious countenance, was looking through a hole in his screen, similar to mine, watching the behaviour of the strangers. These were evidently very shy, and seemed to consider the actions of the tame ones, in venturing so far, as beyond their comprehension.

The decoyman shook his head and made a very wry face as he looked at me, and his whole countenance seemed to express very great doubt as to the ultimate success of his venture.

"Just my luck!" thought I, within myself. "He won't catch any fowl just because I would like to see him to."

But I soon altered my mind on the point, for, with an almost imperceptible gesture, the fowler motioned to his "piper," and, quick as lightning, the little dog flew up round the screen, jumped up over the little partition, and, simultaneously with his appearance on the bank, the hitherto placid wild birds suddenly started up, and with outstretched necks they faced the dog.

Piper, however, evidently did not mean wasting any time, for he was back in a moment, coming over the next little screen with a frisk, and waving his tail gleefully at his master, who, without looking at him, handed him something to eat; but his eye was all the time at the hole, and, evidently satisfied with the result, he waved the little dog on once more, and he himself advanced to the next screen.

Over again went Piper, and round again and back again, in little more than a few seconds, and there he was, at his master's feet, eating again some little morsel, and watching the hand that gave him the signals.

As for the birds, over a score and a half were at the mouth of the pipe, looking as thoroughly astounded as ever ducks can look, and gently murmuring to express their surprise, as ducks will do, when their minds are in any way exercised. But still, they were shy, and, indeed, two or three of their number were already turning tail, when the little dog again appeared in their

sight, again frisked on the bank in front of the next screen, and again disappeared. This was too much for the decoyed ones. They dashed ahead for a yard or two, then settled into a swim, watching with all their might the spot where the piper had disappeared, when lo ! again the deceiver appears, dances about, and disappears. The birds that time were literally dumb with astonishment, and pell-mell with the decoys, they went on ahead, regardless.

Suddenly the boy who, throughout, had been sitting by the back screen watching his father, gets up, and gently takes his cap off. I can just catch a glimpse of the fowler himself, who is at the seventh or eighth screen, looking through. He is holding up his hand, then suddenly drops it. On that signal, the boy glides to the first opening, between the first and second screen and waves his cap, and I hear the splashing of the affrighted birds who then rush up the pipe. In a moment they have turned the bend, whilst the decoys, used to that sort of thing, are complacently drifting out of the pipe, picking up, here and there, a stray corn as they sail by. I then get up and creep towards the fowler, who is signing to me to come along gently, and as I join him at the bend, I perceive thirty odd wild birds huddled up together in the trammel at the end of the pipe. They are struggling with all their might and yelling their very loudest. We quietly walk openly towards them, and the struggling and quacking increase as we draw nigh, so that when we reach the trammel, the birds are positively frantic with affright.

I could not help pitying them, and if I could I would have got them rescued ; but, had I proposed such a thing, no doubt the decoyman would have set me down, then and there, as a downright stark, staring, mad lunatic. So I abstained, with a sigh, from any remarks, and forthwith the fowler unhooked the trammel, stood over it, with his legs astride, and drew forth, one by one, the unhappy fowl, whose struggles and cries were simply heartrending. With a quick motion he lifted them up, one by one, by the neck, held their bodies tight in the left hand, whilst with his right he gave a peculiar wrench about their necks, and all was over. Pitched one by one on the

sward, the whilom so lively birds paid with their lives the penalty of their curiosity; and when the job was over the decoyman arose, rubbing his hands, and patted his dog, who all the while had contented himself with sniffing at the dead birds as their bodies were flung, lifeless, to mother earth.

Clever little dog! He seemed to know that it was owing to his exertions that all that number of fowl had been secured, and certainly he well deserved the caresses of his master.

We were then quite away from the pond, be it said, and completely sheltered from the other fowl thereon by the shrubbery, which covered the whole of the ground which was not under water. "We will go back now," the old man whispered softly in my ear; through sheer habit, no doubt, was this whispering indulged in, for surely we were far enough from the wildfowl, to all intents and purposes, to insure comparative safety from being heard by them, especially as the wind was blowing at the time in our teeth.

Several large hampers were hard by, under the brushwood, and into two of these the dead fowl were bundled. We then picked up again our pans of burning peat, and went back quietly towards the pond.

The decoys were then about the mouth of the tunnel, but many of the wild birds had banked near the next pipe, where they were somewhat sheltered from the wind. Some were pluming themselves contentedly, others were resting, the rest were paddling about on the pond, facing the breeze, and among these I noticed new arrivals in the shape of nine teal, which I had not seen before, and which, therefore, must have come to the pond whilst the previous decoying business was being carried out.

On perceiving the teal, the decoyman's hard features actually relapsed into a smile. He told me afterwards why—simply because teal are so easily decoyed that it made him laugh to see some there.

Howbeit, again his low whistle and his corn brought the decoys forward, as eager as ever, and no sooner did the teal perceive that some feeding was to be had, than they, like simpletons, flocked to the rescue, with such greediness that



they actually half flew, half ran on the top of the water, to get quicker to the corn. Up the pipe went the decoys, following the stream of corn, and after them went the teal, in a great hurry, whilst some half dozen other fowl brought up the rear. And thus the squad went up, so willingly, that the piper was hardly required, and the whole lot were caught and huddled up in the trammel within three minutes. I never saw anything more neatly done. The teal, of course, were the cause of it all, their great confidence deluding the other fowl into the belief that everything was safe and above board.

This concluded our sitting for that day. Soon after twilight began, and the rest of the fowl left, going many miles, perhaps, inland for their nightly feed. The decoyman then fed his decoys for the night, and we all went our way, he and his son carrying the spoils—and pretty well laden they were, too.

Now, as a corollary to that expedition, I ought to add a few necessary details.

Why the pipes are curved is so self-evident that explanations are hardly necessary. Were they straight, the remaining fowl on the pond would see the whole slaughtering business, and that would be enough for them. Then, about the water in the pipes, it is always regulated by a sluice, so that the depth should not exceed eight inches. Were it deeper, the wildfowl might dive, and thus escape the fowlers, as they will do when they are wounded and pursued in deep water by shooters. Of course it need not be observed that the decoymen must always keep to leeward of the birds. Were they to the windward, the fowl would detect their presence and fly away, in spite of all other precautions to the contrary, for, though burning peat is the inseparable companion of the fowler in his decoying operations, yet the scent of man is most quickly detected by the wary and shy fowl, and that would be quite enough to frighten all the fowl away.

As to the dog and decoy ducks, they should be kept in tolerable condition, but not be allowed to get too fat and too lazy. To insure their always being on the alert in day time, whenever wanted, they should have their only meal at night,

after the day's work is over. As regards the ducks, they should be fed at the mouth of the pipe which is most likely, from the state of the wind, to be used in the morning, because they will be all the readier for their work, and if it freezes at all, by their paddling about, and the heat of their bodies, they will prevent ice from being formed at the mouth of the required pipe, and the wildfowl are sure to congregate with them in the morning on the open water. Taken all in all, then, I think that decoying wildfowl into pipes is, though not sport in the strict acceptation of the term, yet sufficiently clever to warrant its being resorted to, and anyhow, I think it is quite fascinating enough, and wonderfully well devised, to warrant my opening sentence—viz., that he who first invented the trick was no fool. It is certainly a most entertaining piece of ingenuity, and one which in good seasons undeniably supplies half the markets with wildfowl.

Decoys, however, are slowly, but surely, dying out. The fens and marshes are drained, then the ground is cultivated, and the decoyman finds his occupation gone. Already many decoys are closed, and others are every year being closed. In times gone by, however, they were exceedingly well-paying concerns, some of them yielding as much as 800*l.* and 1000*l.* a year to their respective owners. This was joining pleasure to business with a vengeance; but this golden era is now nearly a thing of the past. There are, however, still some good decoys left, and these pay, and pay well, when they are in the hands of the right men. The rarest thing, however, to find nowadays is a really good decoyman, and the next rare thing is to secure a good "piper." As for decoy ducks, they can be had easily enough.

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## CHAPTER XLVII.

### FLIGHT PONDS AND ROCK FOWLING.

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THE man who invented the taking of pochards at the flight pond must have been a very bold speculator, for, *primâ facie*, the affair must have appeared a very rash undertaking. Briefly speaking, the thing to be done was as follows: On the pond were a lot of dun birds, which, practically, had defied hitherto the decoyman's ingenuity. There they were, feeding on the best of food which the pond could afford, driving away, or fighting, the ducks, widgeon, or teal, and declining to be decoyed with them into the pipes, in the orthodox manner; for be it known, that in spite of all temptations to the contrary, it is most unusual for a single pochard to be taken up a pipe. What was then to be done? Such was the problem which the community of decoymen set themselves to solve. Now, it was perceived that dun birds or pochards when driven away invariably made off towards any side of the pond which was barest of trees and underwood, simply for the reason that they could not rise in any other quarter, as they are unable to fly right up, like ducks, teal, or widgeon. They skip and splash the water with their wings as they rise for some yards before their short wings can fairly get their bodies up. Hence, they fly at a very low angle for some distance before they can be fairly said to be going in full swing. This being so, it struck some inventive soul that if a net were to be suddenly thrown against them when they were thus just on the rise, a vast number of them should necessarily be caught. This was the idea of the flight net, and it is now still being worked in some

quarters, although, for various reasons, it has been abandoned in many others. However, as the process is still being carried on to this day, a summary description thereof is desirable.

Sometimes the flight nets are worked in conjunction with the ordinary decoy pipes; but the flight nets require a separate space all to themselves, as their arrangements differ very widely from the decoy pipes. Firstly, the space between the pond and the net must be perfectly clear of underwood, bushes, or trees, and on the ground over which the net lies flat, before being sprung, the ground must also, of course, be cleared, otherwise brambles might catch into the meshes and tear them. Briefly speaking, then, the apparatus consists of two strong poles between fifty and sixty yards apart, and about twenty yards high, which, by means of heavy weights placed in a box at their bottom end, can be made to rise on a pivot at their base, with more or less rapidity. The net, being laced up between the two poles, intersects thus in the air a space equal to a parallelogram about fifty or sixty yards long by twenty high. The poles work on pins fixed to two main posts, which are generally made of oak, and firmly driven into the ground, so as to stand well the brunt of the heavy poles when they fly up, and to these main posts are fixed cross-bars, which keep the poles up when once they have been released. Before using the net on fowl, it is usual to try the apparatus well, so as to make sure that no mishap will occur when it will be actually required for work. By means of two lines which run through sheaves, one at the top of each pole, two of the decoyman's assistants haul them down, not quite flat on the ground, but resting on two forked posts, ready placed to secure them; and in the middle the fowler himself stands near the trigger-post, and the trigger, of course, is connected by means of a line with those forked posts. The net then is lying parallel to the ground. At a given signal the fowler pulls the ring-bolt, which releases the poles, when the weight at their bottom at once tends to bring them to a perpendicular position. But the assistants must steady this rise by means of the ropes in their hands; otherwise, such would be the impetus given to the poles, that they would probably smash everything,

and fall flat on the other side into the pond. The twin posts are imbedded on a bank built purposely for them, eight or ten yards from the pond, and rising generally to five or six feet. This bank, and a few reed screens judiciously disposed, hide the fowler's operations. At the bottom of the net deep and narrow ditches are dug, or some other receptacle is prepared, into which the birds are to fall; and, although there is no covering to these ditches, the birds, once in them, cannot get out of them. It has, however, occurred now and then that, so large was the number of birds caught, that the ditches or baskets were well nigh filled to overflowing, and accordingly a few of the birds managed to scramble out, and escaped. But this is a very rare occurrence indeed. Now, to illustrate the practical working of the flight net, we will suppose that the decoy-man and his assistants, having observed a large number of dunbirds on the pond, are all ready at that one of the nets which is likely to be the one required. The fowler gets all the fastenings cast off, except those which connect the rising of the poles with the trigger-bolt, and his two assistants have the ropes in hand, ready to steady the rise of the net. Everything being ready, a signal is given to a man or a lad, who is in hiding on the other side of the pond, and he, by suddenly showing himself, and waving his arms or his hat, urges the frightened fowl to rise. This they do, skimming over the surface of the pond, and slowly rising right towards the net. The trigger-man allows the leaders to pass freely, which inspires such confidence to the rest of the flock that, like a flock of sheep, they rush pell-mell on the same track, oblivious of anything which may occur on their line of flight. By this time, however, the fowler has released the ring bolt, and the net, rising slowly, but irresistibly, meets the full charge of the body of the flock. The birds' flight being thus suddenly arrested, they are perfectly powerless to recover themselves, and they drop like a shower of stones into the narrow ditches or crates placed at the bottom of the net, and there they are seized, one by one, and their necks are twisted. In former times immense numbers of dunbirds used to be caught by this

means. Indeed, it was not uncommon for four, five, or six hundred birds to be caught at one drop; but now flight pondmen have to be content with smaller catches, and eventually under the advance of drainage and railways, many flight ponds will probably cease to pay. Respecting the working of the affair, it is not always necessary to send a flusher round to disturb the birds. At flight time, if the net in the line of flight of the fowl be worked, they will be caught quite as readily. Still, if help is handy, it is always best to resort to it, because the birds are so distrustful and so cunning, that, if they have any idea of anything going on in a particular quarter of the pond, they will leave it by the other end. And, indeed, even when flushed in the usual manner, they often defy the flusher's efforts by skimming on the water and settling again on the ponds, rather than rising.

However, I have now given a summary description of the flight pond, and think it will be sufficient for all practical purposes, as I intend this book to treat more especially of wild-fowling when the gun is brought into play. For this reason I shall also very briefly refer to rock fowling, as carried on in St. Kilda, the Shetland Islands, and abroad. The chief way in which this is carried on consists in the men being lowered by means of a rope down the face of the cliffs or rocks, and it need not be remarked that such a system is very dangerous. Indeed, most rock fowlers end their lives by having their necks broken when engaged in this dangerous pursuit. Sometimes two rocks are connected by means of ropes, and a sort of tramway is thus constructed on which to run a cradle. In St. Kilda all these plans are resorted to, and a fowling rope is invariably the heirloom of every family. This fowling rope is made of thongs of raw cow-hide, and it is, practically, almost everlasting. The plan of operation there is excessively simple. At night the fowler is lowered by his companions on some rock, and there turns his back against the cliff. His dress must be of exactly the same colour as that of the surrounding rocks; but on his breast is sewn a large piece of dazzlingly white linen. The flying birds in the darkness, taking this piece of white linen to be a resting place on the

rock, come to it and attempt to alight on it. Of course the St. Kildian lays hold of them, twists their necks, and throws them down, if he has room for them, near his feet. If not, by means of a string tied to his belt, he secures them there, one after the other, as fast as he can gather them, and when he has a sufficient number he ties them to his signal line, and his companions haul up the lot. As regards solan geese, the St. Kildians creep to them when they are laying, and snatch them one after the other, as quietly as possible, so as not to alarm the others. It is said that if one of the geese is left on its nest when killed, all its neighbours, with great lamentations, mourn for its death, when the venturesome rockman, taking advantage of the noise, can lay hold of many of them. This may be true, but I have never seen it done. As regards the young of the solan geese and their eggs, the rockmen make a very abundant harvest of them. They also, by means of nooses tied at the end of long, light poles, procure many birds at roost by slipping the noose over their heads. There is also a plan which is carried out in Hirta, by which a large number of puffins are caught. Puffins are so silly that if one is pulled about it does not strike at the intruder, but lays hold of its direct neighbour on the other side. This being a well-known feature in their character, the people of Hirta train little dogs to go puffin hunting; and when the birds are huddled up together in recesses of the rocks in winter time, when a dog lays hold of a puffin, the latter seizes upon his direct neighbour, this one does the same to the next, and so on, until a whole string of them is pulled out. Some of these dogs are exceedingly well trained, and of course are considered very valuable to the Hirtians.

There are doubtless, here and abroad, a few more expedients resorted to, but as the gun is not brought into play with them, and the subjects have been treated of already at full length by various authors, I need not enter into further details here.

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## CHAPTER XLVIII.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS.

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DECOYS, as is well known, are protected by law—*i.e.*, no man has the right to wilfully disturb the fowl, either when they are in the decoy, or when they are on their way to it. There is no fixed penalty for thus disturbing the fowl; but according to the gravity of the offence—*i.e.*, the wilfulness of the act—the penalty rises, and is left in the hands of the court, and any decoy which has been established without let or hindrance from its direct neighbours for a period of twenty years is at law considered thus privileged. If the offenders have trespassed on the precincts of the decoys they can be prosecuted according to the law of trespass. But if the offenders have fired off guns, even from their own lands adjoining the decoy, they are amenable at common law, and the same holds good if the offence was committed on the salt water immediately adjoining the decoy. Thus it will be perceived that if any man engaged in the pursuit of wildfowling on an estuary chooses to fire off his gun, either in the air or at fowl, within such proximity of the decoy as to disturb the fowl that may be therein, or others that may be on their way thither, the man is amenable to a penalty for so doing.

Respecting gun licences for wildfowl shooting, it should be remarked that a ten shilling gun licence is sufficient as far as fowl and shore birds are concerned. But for shooting snipe and woodcocks a game licence is required. Whilst on the subject of woodcock shooting, it may not be out of place to mention that, besides a large number of these birds being taken in springes, a good many are also caught in nets, and not



a few abroad are killed at the hut. I have myself assisted at hut-shooting practice, and, indeed, I have practised it myself in Alsace. For a description of this adventure I would refer my readers to the second edition of the first series of my "Shooting and Fishing Trips," chapter xviii., pages 150, 151, and 152. In England, however, this sort of dodge (which is simply infallible) is never, or very rarely, resorted to.

Now, as it may be of use, I append a list of the terms which are used by wildfowl shooters.

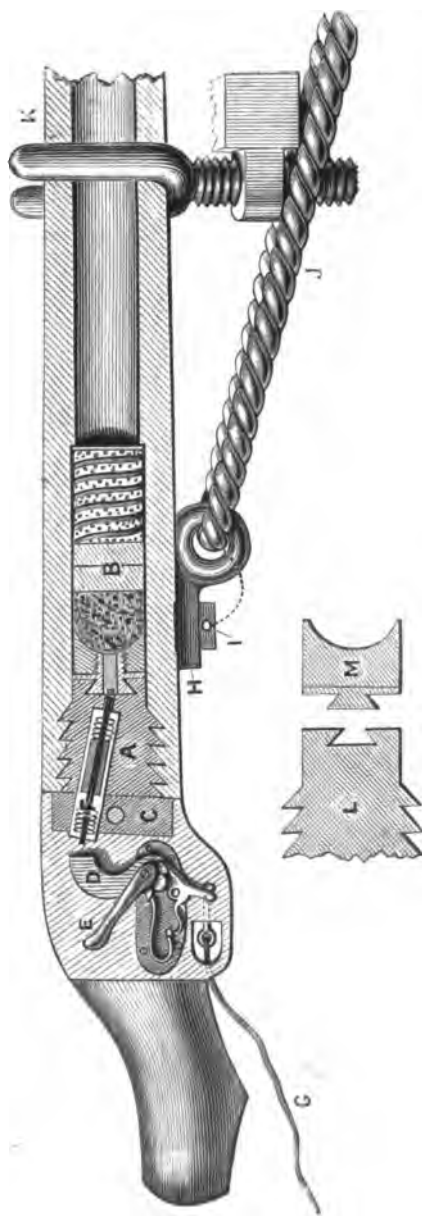
#### WILDFOWL NOMENCLATURE:—

A "herd" of swans.	A "spring" of teal (seven or eight).
A "gaggle" of geese (when on the water).	A "dopping," five or six birds.
A "string" or a "skein" of geese (when on the wing).	A "dopping" of divers (fifty or sixty).
A "paddling" of ducks (when on the water).	A "covert" of coots.
A "team" of ducks (when in the air).	A "herd" of curlews.
A "sord" or "suit" of mallards.	A "sedge" of herons.
A "company" of widgeon (a large flock).	A "wing" or "congregation" of plovers.
A "bunch" (thirty or forty).	A "desert" of lapwings.
A "trip" (twenty or so).	A "walk" of snipes.
A "knob" (a dozen or so).	A "wisp" (a few) of snipes.
A "flight" or "rush" of dunbirds.	A "fling" or "cloud" of ox-birds.
	A "hill" of ruffs.

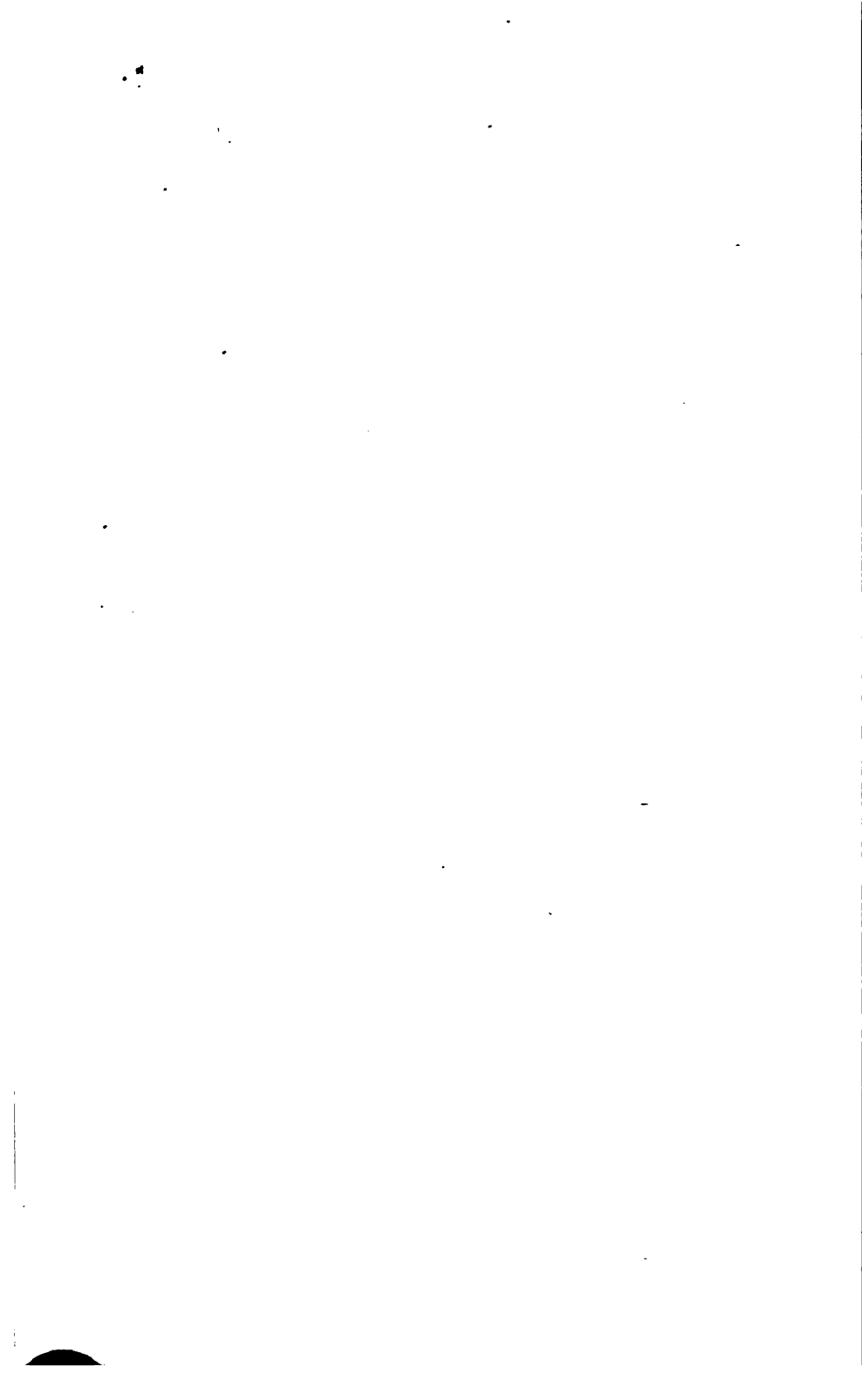
These expressions are most rigidly adhered to by wildfowl shooters, who are, as a class, the most conservative of men.

Before bringing these remarks to an end I must give here a description of Messrs. Moore and Grey's breech-loading central-fire punt gun, of which I append an engraving:

A. Screw plug, with dovetail extractor.	G. Line to trigger.
B. Cartridge, with shot in spiral wire.	H. Shackle for rope breeching, held in place by pin I.
C. Lever hole, to unscrew plug.	J. Rope breeching leading under deck of punt.
D. Striker hammer inside metal box.	K. Gun crutch on punt.
E. Outside lever, to cock gun.	L. Extractor.
F. Plunger, for central-fire ignition.	M. Base of cartridge case.



MESSES. MOORE AND GREY'S BREECH-LOADING CENTRAL-FIRE PUNT GUN.



The drawing is so clear that no further explanations are needed at my hands. One thing, however, puzzles me, and it is, that the rope breeching is stated to lead under the deck of the punt. I cannot agree with this, because I always advocate breeching ropes being on deck, so as to be always readily inspected, fastened, and unfastened. How could the rope be daily inspected and quickly made fast and loosened—whenever opportunity required—if it were made fast under the punt's deck? On yachts the thing could be readily managed; but on a punt it is undesirable.

The following is a list of the punt guns which are built on the above plan by Messrs. Moore and Grey :\*

Bore.	Weight.	Loads.		Requirements.
		Powder.	Shot.	
in. 2	lb. 200	oz. dra. 5 5	lb. 2	For yacht, steam launch, and land carriage.
1½	150	4	1½	For double punt, with yacht or steam launch in attendance.
1½	125	3 5	1½	For large double punt.
1½	100	2 12	1	For double or single punt.
1½	75	2 0	¾	For single punt and inland waters.
1½	50	1 6	¾	For single punt for collecting specimens.

The next improvement I would wish to draw attention to is the American revolving stool for shooting over decoys or on marsh land, or from boats. The illustration on the next page also speaks for itself.

I need merely add that the whole affair can be disjointed or put together at a moment's notice, and when the apparatus is packed up for transit it occupies a very small space. Its diameter is but ten inches, therefore it occupies but very little

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\* Messrs. Moore and Grey's address is 43, Old Bond-street, London.

room, and its handiness for boat work is undeniable. The makers are Messrs. Henry Sears and Co., No. 88, Lake-street, Chicago, U.S.



And now I append a list of the leading wildfowl shooting requirements. Independently of all requisites for the mere managing and sailing of the yacht, dinghies, and punts, and for the feeding and bodily comforts of the sportsman and his attendants or companions, the following is a list of the things which I have found necessary or desirable to have, so as to be prepared against any emergency. Of course I need not enumerate the guns—stanchion, large shoulder and cripple guns, rook rifles and their ammunition :

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| Leather caps for stanchion guns.                                  | Tin and flannel-lined ammunition box.                         |
| Cleaning rods for ditto.  | Oil skins or other waterproof overalls.                       |
| Cleaning rods for shoulder guns.                                  | Oilskin trousers or petticoats.                               |
| Screwdrivers (two or three of different sizes).                   | Sou'-wester.  |
| Cartridge extractors for all guns.                                | Sea boots (Fagg's boots are excellent.)                       |
| Tow and gun oil.  | Woollen mittens.  |
| Small boat and pocket compasses.                                  | Wool and paper cones for birds to be stuffed.                 |
| Admiralty charts.   | Landing net.  |
| Fuses.  | Ice sandals.  |
| Sea glass.  | Canvas cork cushions or india-rubber bags for punt, as seats. |
| Aneroid barometer.  |   |
| Wildfowler's mud pattens.   |   |
| Sponge for bailing out punt or dinghy, and cleaning blood stains. |   |

One setting pole for single-handed punt, and two poles for double-handed ones.

Bar of wood or leather belt to press down the stock of the gun.

Punt carriage, if necessary, at the landing place.

Change of clothing.

Ice hook and axe.

Slings for cripple and shoulder guns.

Paddles, sculls, skeleton rowlocks,

outriggers, wooden thowls and their doubles.

Stretchers.

American revolving stool.

Waterproof cover for punt.

Short setting pole for gunner.

Liberian urns for yacht (Messrs Silver's are excellent).

Mufflers for feet.

Small anchors.

Long painters.

Life buoys or swimming coats.

Ice skates for punts.

Empty punt gun cases, &c.

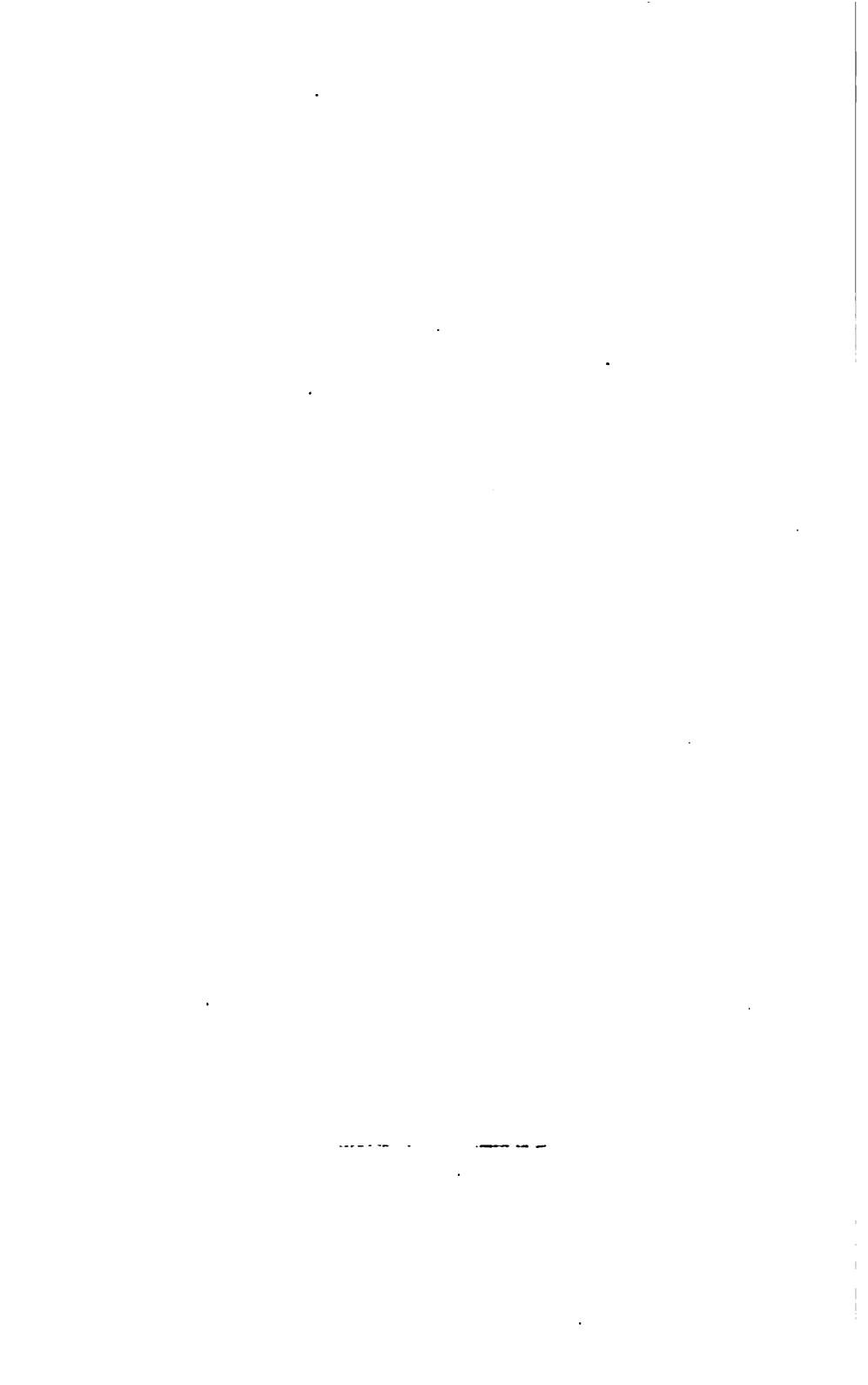
As regards punt gun cases, Messrs. Rigby, of St. James's-street, have made a speciality of their manufacture, and I have used some hundred of their make with the utmost satisfaction.

I always use chilled shot for wildfowl shooting. It is greatly superior to the ordinary soft shot.

As regards the frontispiece illustration of this volume, I should state that the drawing is a correct delineation of my own double-handed punt, which was, very successfully I think, drawn by Mr. Hill, the artist. She is shown in actual work, when myself and my man were sailing to a distant gaggle of Brent geese, and the drawing is so spiritedly given that everyone will understand how the affair is worked. For the benefit of those who would wish to build a craft similar to her, a plan and a side view of that punt are also given.

I have now come to the end of my tether, and if my work inspires into others as great a love of wildfowl shooting as I have always experienced, I could wish for no more pleasant result.

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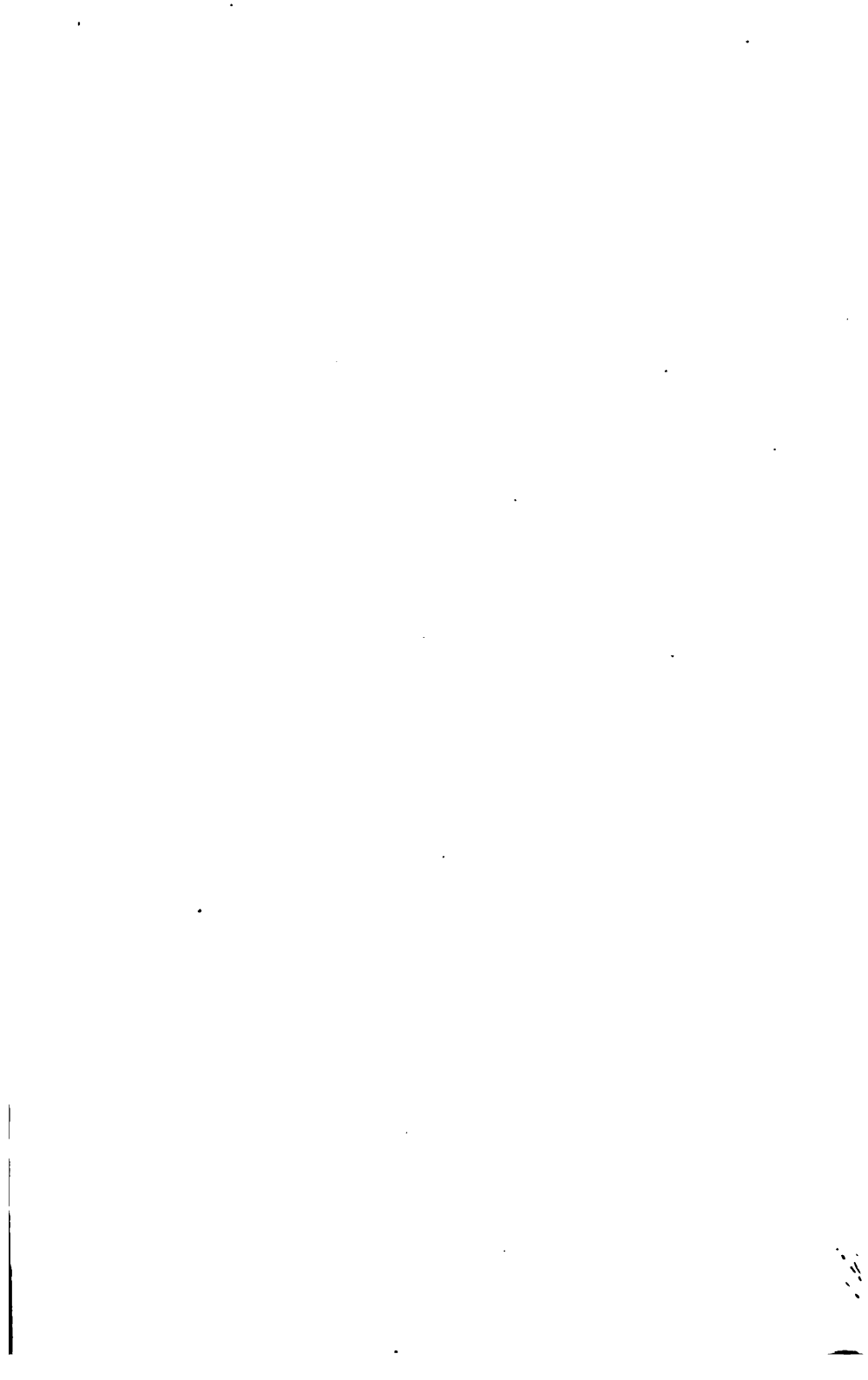
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 consequent loss of support  
 from the people. The second  
 is the fact that the government  
 has been unable to maintain  
 a stable economy. This has  
 led to a loss of confidence  
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 consequent loss of support  
 from the people. The third  
 is the fact that the government  
 has been unable to maintain  
 a stable society. This has  
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